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Dr. PAUL

ETHEL PENMAN HOPE

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DR. PAUL

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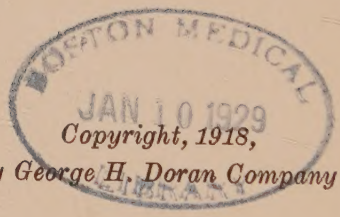
BY

ETHEL PENMAN HOPE

AUTHOR OF "A HILLSIDE CHRISTMAS," ETC.

NEW YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY



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1. G. 264

Printed in the United States of America

TO
MY MOTHER

DR. PAUL

DR. PAUL

CHAPTER I

A LITTLE group of people stood huddled together on the beach. They were looking away out beyond the breaking billows to where two swimmers, mere specks on the water, aided by the incoming tide, slowly but surely made their way towards the shore. A woman in black stood a little apart from the group, her whole attitude suggestive of intense anxiety, and she seemed to be holding herself in control by some master will power. Not a muscle of her face relaxed as she kept her field glasses fixed upon the two dark objects as they rose and fell with the waves. In the east clouds were rolling up in huge banks of blackness, while the grey warning of an approaching storm overspread the whole line of the vision.

The huge crested billows swept by the rising wind into ever-increasing fury, dashed and spent themselves upon the firm white bosom of the shore, and in all the tumult of their anger lashed and sprayed the rocks which here and there jutted out into the sea.

The wind blew the woman's veil about in its mad frolic and played in the folds of her skirt, but she stood tense and immovable, as though "on duty," until the swimmers became clearly discernible, a boy and girl, their faces white and drawn and their strength almost exhausted in their effort to gain the shore. Suddenly the boy's arm went out to the girl and as she ceased swimming her eyes closed. In another moment he had her through the surf and was bending over her, as she lay white and still on the beach. The woman in black eagerly grasped the cold hands of the girl, and was rubbing them, and calling brokenly to her: "Betty—Betty—Betty."

The boy sank upon the sand beside her; a blurred sensation affected his eyes and his body felt numb.

The girl opened her eyes. "It's nothing," she said, slightly bewildered, "I only fainted."

"Are you better?" the mother asked anxiously, wrapping a coat about her.

"Yes, yes," the girl answered, as she got to her feet, "don't worry, mother, I had a pain in my arm, that's what made me faint, but it's getting better now."

The mother put her arm about her, and they started to walk away. "But, mother," the girl said hurriedly turning about, "this boy—he saved me—I had gone too far—and he swam out to tell me to come back. I never could have got in without him, and then—just now—I would have gone under but for him."

The mist had cleared somewhat from the boy's eyes, and he stood up shivering in the wind. "It was nothing," he said simply, addressing the mother; then turning to the girl, "it was her grit that saved us both."

Just then one of the men brought a coat and threw it over his shoulders. "Thanks," he said, "I am a bit cold, that's all."

The mother held her hand out to him. "I cannot thank you enough for what you have done," she said gratefully, "but you are cold and look ill. It was a dreadful swim, and I have lived years since I first missed Betty—but won't you come to see us to-morrow? We are staying at the Cliffside—Mrs. Wilson is my name—what is yours?"

"Robin James," he answered, thanking her and adding, "I'll be glad to go."

At the mention of his name Mrs. Wilson had suddenly stiffened, while the smile left her face and her eyes looked coldly at him. "We shall be out to-morrow," she said icily.

Then taking Betty's arm they made their way quickly along the beach, leaving Robin as he hurriedly walked away, greatly dazed and bewildered.

"What is the matter, mother?" Betty asked when they arrived at their rooms. "Don't you want him to come to-morrow? I like him and he is the best swimmer I ever knew."

"Betty," her mother answered in a harsh voice, "we leave here the day after to-morrow."

The next moment the tears came and she clasped the girl tightly to her. "You're all I have left, Betty darling," she whispered hoarsely. "I have been almost crazy with suspense, fearing all manner of things. Thank God you are safe—my dear—my dear."

And Betty, tired and sore, rested in her mother's arms and cried, too. Then after a little her mother spoke, and her voice was harsh again. "But this boy, this Robin James—never mention him again, Betty."

* * * * *

It was hard for Betty to understand why their stay at this beautiful resort was to be terminated so suddenly, and why her mother had forbidden her to mention the name of Robin James again. Somehow she liked his name, and repeated it over many times the following morning, as she pictured to herself the incident of the preceding day, filled as it had been with adventure and achievement. In the afternoon, because her mother, still with that strange severity, forbade her the beach, remarking: "That if the boy, Robin James, speak to her, she must have as little to say to him as possible," she wanted to question her as to the whys and wherefores, but her mother's stern countenance encouraged nothing of that nature, and so she made her way, much puzzled, to the woods, where little paths ran here and there among the trees.

Following one of these paths, she came upon a

clearing where some picnickers had evidently been taking their lunch, for the fire was still smouldering, and a crude little table of boards and stumps had been hastily erected. She gathered some acorns, then sat down and began playing jacks with them, while inwardly she was wondering what all the trouble was about, and at the same time wishing that she did not have to leave such a pretty place, and curious as to where they should go on the morrow.

"Ough," she suddenly exclaimed as she tried to jump up, but was held down by two hands pressed tightly over her eyes.

"Ough," again. "Who is it? I am frightened. Let me go," all in one breath, while she struggled to get to her feet.

"If you promise not to look till I get behind a tree, I'll let go," said a voice which sounded somewhat familiar, so familiar that her fear left her and she stopped struggling.

"All right, let me go then. Who are you?" opening her eyes. "I know, it's Robin James," then "Ough."

"Why ough?" he asked, looking from behind his tree.

"Why are you hiding?" she asked.

"I'll tell you why, if you tell me why you said 'ough,'" he asked, rather shyly, as he cut into the bark of the tree with his jack-knife.

"My mother," she began timidly, then paused, wondering if she should say it.

"Well, so did mine," he commented, still cutting.

"What did she say?" Betty demanded.

"Let's talk it over," he suggested, coming forth and sitting down on the grass beside her. "It's the queerest thing I ever knew. Do you know what the trouble is? What did your mother say?"

"You tell me first what your mother said," the girl answered, feeling that her story would be hard to tell.

"No, girls first," said he, plunging his open knife into the sod, more determinedly than the occasion demanded.

"Well, my mother," she began hesitatingly, "said that I wasn't to ever mention your name again, and we are leaving this place to-morrow. Mamma's packing up to-day—and I'm afraid to ask the reason. It's because you're here, I know that—but why?"

"Yes, why?" he commented, removing his hat and leaning his elbow on it. "That's the question—why?"

"What did your mother say?" Betty demanded now.

"Just the same thing, almost, only we're leaving to-night. When I got home, of course, I had to tell her about it; at first she was jolly pleased that I'd helped you, and all that, but say—when I told her that your name was Betty Wilson, you should have seen her."

"Did she look cross?" chimed in Betty.

"You just bet she did—cross is no word for it."

"What did she say?" again demanded the girl.

"Just what your mother said," Robin went on, feeling a bit ill at ease, yet considering it necessary to be truthful, "only more and worse."

"More and worse," Betty repeated, assuming a haughty air. "How worse?"

"Well," he was determined to make a clean breast of it, "she said that the name Wilson had been the torment of her life, that it wasn't the first place she had had to leave because of it and—oh well—a lot more there's no use telling you. She was plain mad —that's all."

"Did she tell you not to go on the beach but to go to the woods?" asked Betty.

"Yes, and not to speak more than was necessary to you if I met you," Robin answered, feeling relieved now that he had told it all.

"And my mother said the same thing." Betty's voice was serious for she felt hurt and puzzled.

"Which wasn't half bad of them, was it?" laughed Robin, and despite her perplexity she had to laugh, too.

"What would they say if they saw us now?" she queried.

"Yes, what would they say? But look here, let's forget it, I can't make it out—I lay awake all night thinking about it—but believe me—I give it up. Evidently your mother doesn't like my mother's name and my mother doesn't like your mother's name, so when either of them hears the other's,

there's fireworks and a change of address. But why, search me," he concluded as he tossed into Betty's lap a whistle he had cut out of the stick he had been whittling.

"How do you do it?" she asked.

"That's easy for a boy," he boasted. "You should see me carve a heart in an acorn. Shall I do it?"

"Yes, I'd like to see you." Then after a thoughtful moment: "Is your father here too?"

"No," said Robin, "he's dead, died when I was a little fellow. Is yours here?"

"No, he's dead, too," she said simply, "and I miss him so." A tear showed in her eye and Robin didn't like to ask her about him, but in a moment she went on. "Mother and I are chums." Then looking wistfully at him, "Don't you wish your father was alive?"

"You bet," he answered. "It would be great to have a father. I've two brothers, though, both older than I and lots of uncles. Say, you should see my cousin——"

"Oh, so have I," interrupted Betty, feeling the desire to brag, "I have hosts of uncles and aunts—and cousins—but no brothers or sisters. It would be fine to have them. Now a brother like my cousin——"

"Oh," broke in Robin, "brothers, if they're older, are away all the time, and they don't do you much good. Mine are at college, and when they come

home, I'm the kid. It's no great fun being the youngest."

He turned suddenly and held up the heart he had cut in the acorn. "Wait," he said, "I'll put a little hole in it for a string to go through." Then in a moment, "Here, would you like to have it? You may, if you like."

"Thanks," said Betty, "I wonder if I could cut one, too. Will you let me try?"

"Sure," said the boy, "but girls aren't much good at this sort of thing, but if you want to try, take it, and here's a good acorn," handing her knife and nut.

He watched her as she cut away and in a short time she held it up, quite a perfect heart, almost as good as his.

"I'll put the hole in it for a string," said the boy.

"Never mind, it's no use," she answered, throwing the nut on the ground. "I have to be going home now." The little girl had grown suddenly shy and Robin didn't understand it.

"Say," he exclaimed, "wouldn't it be fine if our mothers happened to land at the same place again. We wouldn't need to mention names and then they'd never know." He had become quite enthusiastic and stood close to Betty, his laughing eyes watching for the laugh in hers.

"Yes," she said without smiling. "It would be fun, but I hate going to new places. I'd much rather stay here. Well, good-bye," and she turned on to

the little winding path leading out into the open. "Thank you for helping me yesterday—and—I'm sorry about our mothers. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he called as he watched her blue dress blend into the green, and the dancing golden curls fade from view. Then as he whistled without tune he kept looking intently in the grass at his feet for something. As he caught sight of it he bent quickly, and after casting a furtive glance into the green on all sides of him, picked it up and slipped it into his pocket. Then hurriedly looking around on all sides again and whistling the same few notes without tune, he too disappeared into the shadow down the path.

CHAPTER II

VIRGINIA MOLSON stood leaning her graceful arms on the old-fashioned black mantel as she wistfully watched the fantastic play of the flames and sparks, as the fire from the huge pine log illumined the room.

Outside the air was cold with that early spring chill that at evening settles on the earth, after the snow has gone and before the sun has melted the heart of the winter's frost.

The girl by the mantel was tall and slender and the black dress that she wore, relieved only by simple white at the neck, contrasted strongly with the wonderful purity and beauty of her countenance. She seemed as one in a dream and only lifted her head when footsteps sounded on the steps without, and some one walked unannounced into the room and spoke her name.

"Virginia."

"Is it you, Paul?" her voice was low and ineffably sweet.

"I tried to come earlier, as you requested, dear, but was delayed a bit at the club." Paul James apologised as he stood beside her and took her hand in his.

"I was sorry to have to ask it, Paul, and hope that you were not hurried. I know how very busy you have been."

"Not a bit," he answered, drawing her to him and leading her to a lounge in front of the blaze, "though I think to-day has been the busiest in all my experience at the hospital. But in fact the whole week has been one serious operation after another—and to-morrow—but, Virginia, don't let us talk of myself. Since Monday, my heart has been constantly with you. That's one reason why the week has been extremely trying. I have wanted so much to come to you and could not. I hope that my little notes and flowers helped some. Did they, dear?" He drew her closer and turned her face up to him. "Is your heart so full of sadness that even I cannot drive any of it away, Virginia?"

"Yes, it is sad, Paul; I cannot lift myself out of the cloud yet." She would not look into his eyes and drew herself a little away. Her coldness hurt him and he took his arms from about her, although he held one of her soft white hands in his and pressed it tenderly.

"Your father was a great man, dear," he attempted to speak naturally, "and the years have been many and happy that you have all spent together. His death leaves your hearts very sad, but won't you let me comfort you a little, Virginia?" as he again tried to draw her closer to him. But she held herself aloof and after a moment got up and went

over to the mantel, where she leaned her head on her arm and made him no answer.

He went to her and took her into his arms.

"Won't you speak to me, dear; won't you tell me the trouble? On Monday, that most trying day, I thought that my love for you helped to lift the burden. You told me that it did, and now—just a few days between, while I have been longing to be near you but could not come—and after the most nerve-straining day I have ever put in, with a similar one before me on the morrow—I come to you to love you—and have you love me, Virginia, for I need you too, dear. Lift your beautiful face to me and tell me that you love me."

"Paul!" She drew herself gently away and stood erect and proud before him, her large brown eyes suddenly growing black and luminous, and a deep flush of colour tinging her cheeks and neck. "Paul James!" In her voice was that note of Molson pride inherited from generations of Molsons before her. "You know what was really the cause of my father's death—you know, you must know—the one thing that so often robbed this home of its happiness. It was terrible to lose father—for he was a great and a good man—and we loved him—and we meant much to him—but that one thing, which he did not control—oh, yes, I know he tried, and tried, more than any of us know—but it is the sting of the shame—Paul James—that has eaten into my heart

with its cruel sharpness." She paused while a mist blurred her eyes.

"But, Virginia," he began.

"No, Paul, I am not finished—hear me through. My father inherited this thing from his father—you know the loathing I have always had for it. You know what a tragedy—oh, yes—hidden from the eyes of the world it may be—but none the less real—it has been in this home—and, Paul, if it has been so with us, what has it been with you, and what have you done to-night?"

"Virginia," he spoke, while he dare not look into her suffering eyes, "it was nothing—please believe me—my nerves were so used up I had to have it. If you knew what I have ahead of me to-morrow and what little reserve nerve I have left, you would understand. Won't you be kind and tell me that you understand? Virginia, don't you love me?" he pleaded as he reached out for her.

She turned from him and stood looking into the blazing fire, while her heart cried out in its agony to forgive him, this once more. But she clasped her hands behind her, so that she would not yield to his touch, while the old Molson pride spoke up within her and she heard it answer him. "You broke your word to me, Paul—I can never trust you again."

"Yes, I have broken my word to you, Virginia; but did you ever think just what the keeping of it for so long has meant to me? Do you know any-

thing about the struggle I have sometimes had—and I have won out always—until to-night? Won't you appreciate that? I will give you my word——"

"Your word," she broke in, "that has been broken. It means nothing. You promised me solemnly—yes, that's the word—solemnly—and to break it just now, too, after what we have been through. I could never trust you again." Her eyes snapped with fire while she looked superb in her anger. "What do you care? You say that you love me and yet what does it amount to? Am I not worth the keeping of a promise? No, in your eyes, I am not worth that, for you have broken yours."

"Won't you listen to me?" he pleaded, his eyes full of pain.

"To what effect?" she answered him. "I am not worth the keeping of one promise; how could I be worth the keeping of another? You broke one, you'd break another." Her emotion was running high and she listened only to the voice of her pride.

Pride also spoke to him and he moved slightly away from her, while the dignity of the House of James for centuries back seemed concentrated in him.

"Your tone is harsh, Virginia," he spoke up, "and your words are words of anger. They were thrust to pierce my heart and they have not missed their mark. They have strengthened me well for to-morrow. What do I need of added stimulant when you have filled my soul with the wine of your wrath?

Where is the love that I thought you bore for me? Poor fool that I was to plead for it. What is a woman's trust? There is no such thing. What is a woman's love? She does not understand what love is, who does not know how to forgive. You do not love me, Virginia!"

He made the statement, but in the depths of his soul he meant it for a question, and his heart, though filled with pride, throbbed wildly as it waited her answer.

She did not reply, but walked slowly to the window and looked out upon the shadows already folding in the night. The colour had left her face and her eyes were filled with sadness. She slipped something off the third finger of her left hand, and held it for a moment; then with that dignity of motion that was her natural heritage, she turned and without looking at him handed it to him. "I will need this no longer, Paul," she said, while her voice had lost its high courage and strength of pride and was so low that he hardly heard it.

He looked at her and his eyes held suffering and sorrow in them, but he did not speak, while slowly he stretched out his hand and took it, then he turned and stood in front of the blazing fire and dropped it into the flames.

She looked out at the gathering night, and its chill and gloom seemed to enter into her soul, but the pride still present within her kept her head turned

from him as Paul James walked slowly out of the room.

She watched him as he went down the steps, the eagerness of life gone from his bearing; while the shadows of night wrapt him about.

CHAPTER III

MRS. MOLSON, always a delicate woman and one who had been petted and spoiled all her life, had been laid up since her husband's death suffering from a nervous collapse. In this condition she was extremely irritable and as fretful as a child.

She had asked several times for Virginia, but the little maid hesitated to call her.

As Virginia turned from the window, the blaze from the pine log died down into just a few red coals and little heaps of ashes. She tried to smother within her the love that had been the light and dream of her heart during the past year.

As the shadows deepened without, within her heart the night had already come, and she thought that her love was as the ashes in the grate.

When the maid finally called her, she went listlessly. There seemed nothing worth while in the world—nothing worth having and nothing worth getting, but that which she had lost. It would never be hers again. It had gone forever, and in her bitterness she said that Love was a fable—at best a fairy tale to amuse the simple. She had been simple—had believed that this gift of Love was hers,

and had been heaven-sent. Bitter tears filled her eyes, but her pride drove them back.

"You have been long, Virginia. Did Anna not call you some time ago?" the invalid enquired in a tired voice that ended in a sigh.

"Yes, I have been long, mother, but Anna only called me now."

"Your Dr. Paul made quite a call," continued the weary voice. "Did he enquire for me?"

"Certainly—or rather I think so," uncertainly ended Virginia, her mind not quite clear on that point.

"When you're so uncertain he probably forgot that courtesy." The invalid turned wearily and, sighing, continued: "You were both no doubt engrossed in your own happiness. The young soon leave sorrow behind, but I am here, laid low by a dreadful tragedy." Her weary voice trailed on in ceaseless monotony. "What have I now to look forward to? All my life I have suffered physically, and only God knows what I have borne of inner sorrow that the world knows nothing about. Oh, why has one so weak as I been given such a load to carry? Then came the financial loss of a few years ago, and the necessity for this humble home—the loss of so many friends—and now—as though my poor soul had not endured enough—this tragedy—the death of your father. Oh, what are we to do,—what will become of me?" she ended in almost a cry.

Virginia had found it difficult to listen to this

recital of grief. She had heard the same cry so often during the past week—a week that had been most trying to them both—but to-night it seemed the very climax of misery.

"I will secure a position somewhere. Surely there is something I can do." She answered that cry of selfish misery with some of the old Molson spirit.

"I was not thinking of you, Virginia. You will be married soon and happy. But what is to become of me? I will not live with you—I could not. I have too much pride for that. There is not enough money to maintain this house for me alone. Oh, if I had a son—if the Lord had only sent me a son—he would now be the staff on which my worn-out spirit could lean, now in my trouble—now in my hour of darkness."

The pampered, spoiled little woman turned restlessly on her frilled bed. A faint rose flush dyed her delicate cheeks, making prettier still the fair unwrinkled countenance, while she nervously fingered the rings on her small white hands.

Mrs. Molson had been carefully guarded all her life from physical hardship. She had accepted the tender solicitude and care as her natural due. Both husband and daughter had made her always their first consideration. She was dainty and frail, so like a delicate rose that she needed every care.

Virginia had attempted to speak several times during this last painful recital, but the weary voice had gone on unheeding.

For a moment now she forgot her mother's frailty and the consideration which had been her life-long habit. Her own heart ached with its burden of pain and she felt that she must speak.

"Mother, I am not going to be married," she said, unheeding the cry from the bed, "never—I will earn my living and will look after you. You will want for nothing that my hands and strength can work for. I am done with love, it's a fable, a chimera, and is not for me."

"Virginia," the voice interrupted, "what have you done? What new trouble is this? Surely I have had enough to bear—but go on—tell me—why have you quarrelled with Dr. Paul?"

"I will tell you, mother—but never again are we to speak of it. You knew that Paul's father was very much addicted to drink—and though he was the greatest surgeon in the country, and enjoyed a reputation shared by none, he had one enemy that finally mastered him. It is needless to remind you of the similarity between his life and father's in that respect. They were both great men, each in their own profession—but each feared a common enemy —and each died in his company."

"Daughter, you are cruel—cruel," the tired voice complained.

"No, not cruel, mother, just true, and you must understand it, and so must I. I never told you that Paul naturally inherited the fear of this same enemy, and once in Vienna, and once since returning home,

they have linked arms together for a while. Oh, yes, it's true, mother. I tried to forget it, because he promised me that it would never happen again." The girl paused, her bosom heaving and her face flushed, while her dark eyes shone with indignation. Her wounded pride was speaking and she paid no heed to her mother's exclamations of surprise. "But he broke his word to me, mother. What is the love of a woman compared with a bottle of wine! He came here to see me to-night, knowing what had caused my father's death—knowing the tragedy of both our homes—and the sorrow and sting of the shame that we are suffering from now—he broke his word and then came to see me. Mother, how could he do it?"

"Oh! Oh! How could he?" the weary voice reiterated.

There was a moment's pause and Virginia laid her ringless hand on the soft white one on the bed. Her voice had lost its passion and she said gently, "It's over now, mother; don't worry about it. I'm sorry to have excited you. Paul and I were never meant for each other—that's all. I could never trust him, and where there is no trust, there can be no love. Can't you rest now? I will earn enough money for us both, and we'll be happy yet, won't we, mother dear?" Her voice was very low and tears filled her eyes, one dropped on the soft white hand of the mother.

"Virginia, I am sorry, dear," the tired voice said

in a supreme effort to comfort. "I am sorry—but he never loved you—or he would not have acted so."

"No, he never loved me," Virginia whispered. "There is no such thing as love. It's all a fairy tale, dear, frail little mother—all a fairy tale. They don't live happily ever after—for it's not true. Only pain and sorrow and heartaches are true—that's all, mother dear."

* * * * *

The next morning Anna, the little maid, in cleaning the fireplace opened her eyes wide in astonishment on finding Virginia's ring, somewhat blackened but unhurt, among the ashes. It had fallen through the grating.

"I found it in the ashes," she said, on handing it to Virginia. "It must have slipped from your finger as you stood by the fire."

As Virginia took it, even the Molson pride could not keep the tears from filling her eyes, and as they blurred her vision the diamonds shone clearer and clearer through their mist, as in their flow the ashes in the setting were all washed away.

CHAPTER IV

PAUL JAMES walked for hours that night, fighting the enemy which beckoned to him alluringly, promising peace to his heart and strength to his worn-out nerves, a solace to the grief and disappointment that made his soul weary and sick, a little sweet forgetfulness in place of the agony of remembrance.

Alongside this alluring deceiver appeared the spectre of love. It had been but a spectre all along. Its garments had been wondrous in beauty and so dazzling that he had been deceived. Now these garments of hope, and faith, and trust (as he had thought them) had fallen away, only the spectre remained, and it was laughing at him.

When he arrived home, the hour was late, and Aunt Arabella sat dozing by the fireplace, the Bible on her lap, open at the Book of Job.

Arabella, his father's maiden sister, had taken charge of the home since the death of Paul's mother when he was a little boy, and was the only mother he could remember. She opened her eyes as he came in, but said nothing, and he walked over to the fire and with great energy stirred it into a last, feeble blaze.

"No," he said, in a voice Arabella had never heard before, "it will only burn a minute more, then it's done forever. Her fire is out, too. Nothing left soon of either—all a dream—all a farce—it will soon be a nightmare—a ghost—that's it—a ghost—but I'll soon get the better of it. Sure, who cares?—no one. That's it—no one cares."

"Paul James, what are you saying?" Arabella had stiffened and her dark eyes snapped fire. "What are you muttering about? Have you lost your reason?"

His face was pale and drawn, and his eyes lustrous with an unnatural light, as he turned to her.

"Oh, no, Aunt Arabella, not my reason, just something of less importance," and his short, harsh laugh was not pleasant to hear. "You see, I've been trying to stir this almost dead fire into life again. It can't be done, it's dying—even as we look—see it's dead. All fires die, no matter how beautiful the blaze, they all die, don't they?"

"If you haven't lost your reason, you speak as though you had," she answered haughtily. "Where have you been to-night? If you were at the hospital you are done out, and need to go to bed."

"No, I didn't go to the hospital. I am going there to-morrow. Can't I have a night off occasionally to enjoy myself, Aunt? I went to what I thought was a temple of joy and faith and trust—and I found—yes, I found—that it was a morgue. Horrid, wasn't it?"

"Paul, you're beside yourself, you've been working too hard. You always had a strange streak in you. I am sure you don't get it from the James side of the house. I never heard your father carry on like that, and if any man knew what work was, he did. I have seen him come home at night utterly exhausted, and when he operated it was an operation worth talking about. I am afraid, Paul, that you haven't got it in you to be the man your father was."

"I am fair on the way—along one line in particular, Aunt," he interrupted again with that short harsh laugh.

"Yes, you've made a fine name for yourself, Paul. You're a James, and that means a lot; but your father was a quiet, steady, big man, always had control of himself—except—yes, he had his weakness" —and here Arabella drew herself up haughtily. "But he was a James, and—I am his sister—and you are his son and we will not speak of it."

"Yes," said Paul bitterly, "I am a James, and his son—and I guess you're right, Aunt Arabella—you're rather harsh,—but you're right. Bitter is the only sweet, and truth the only fiction. I will soon be as my father was, yet will I never be. Some conundrums. When my father operated it was an operation, wasn't it? Well, I've got to perform a slight operation in the morning, Aunt—yes, just a slight operation—a compound fracture of the thigh —a poor bushman three days delayed in the woods

before he could get down here—a big gunshot wound with dirty clothing blown into it—just a simple operation, Aunt—just a simple operation, but because I am the son of my father I have to get some rest —so good-night; go on reading Job—patience is a good thing to have—but take a look at Proverbs. Solomon was a wise boy; didn't he say something about 'the heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and 'the way of a fool is right in his own eyes?' True sayings, Aunt, especially about the heart."

"Your speech is foolish, Paul," Arabella said, as she rose and prepared to leave the room. "I cannot understand you. I have needed great patience, and I see that I will have to pray for still more. It is a blessed thing that your sweet mother did not live to witness your display of folly to-night. She would have expected better things of you, Dr. Paul James."

On the writing desk in his room stood a picture of his mother in an old-fashioned gold frame. She was very beautiful, her dreamy dark eyes looking into his, as he always thought, with great love and kindness. Was there sadness lurking there, too? Sometimes Paul thought he could discern a tinge. To-night he took the picture in his hands and sat down by the desk studying it intently. Then he placed it back on the desk in front of him, and unlocked a tiny drawer, taking from it a gold watch which had been his father's. Pasted in the back case was a little picture of his mother. It had been taken

just a few months before her death, and was the one his father had loved best. Love was surely shining from out those dark eyes, and joy alone could cast such sweetness upon the countenance. It was easy to close one's eyes and imagine her an angel now. Paul had often done that, when as a little boy his father had allowed him to open the case and very reverently look into the beautiful face of his mother there. He looked now, then closed his eyes —for he was a boy no longer, and pain and suffering were written upon his face—and in a man's agony his heart called to her.

"Mother—oh, how sweet that name is—I lost you, mother, before I ever really knew you, and I have needed you ever since. You believed in love. You loved father and he cherished you till the day of his death. No other image but yours was ever in his heart. That was the love of years ago—it must have been different then. To-day it's only a myth, mother. Did you have faith in my father? Did you trust him? You did, and he proved worthy of it—but after you left, mother, his heart was too lonely to bear, and you know that he failed you then sometimes, didn't he? Just the thought of you wasn't enough; he needed you. I thought she loved me, mother, as you loved father years ago. I believed in love, in faith, in trust, but now I know I was a fool. I needed her, mother, but she failed me, and now I haven't even her memory. I don't want it—I am going to put it all away from me—I am

done with it forever, and I'll soon be like father. Aunt is right—she's harsh—always has been—not as you would have been, I know—but she's right. I'll never be the great man my father was, but I'm a surgeon, and I'll operate, mother—you just watch me. My hand will be steady—I'll have nerve enough for a thousand—to-morrow."

But the blast of the storm had been too much for him. Life that had been so sweet had been turned too quickly to bitterness; so the utter darkness of night entered into his soul, and in the morning all the joy of living had gone from his heart, and he "didn't care."

* * * * *

Arabella had made it a life-long habit to be down for breakfast every morning, and when Paul was a little boy had seen that he was away to school on time. This thorough training on the question of punctuality had come in well in after years, and Paul often thanked her for it.

Arabella always sustained the pride of the James family in these, as in all social and other matters. A hauteur and severity permeated her actions at all times. When he was a very little boy Paul remembered that she had sometimes kissed him, and as he grew older, he had often wondered if Aunt Arabella's kiss wouldn't exactly correspond with the definition of such a collision in the dictionary. He never confused it with his dream of what a mother's kiss might have been.

In the mornings Arabella always wore a plain black taffeta dress with white collar and cuffs and black jet earrings. When they were home for dinner she would dress in either grey or black silk with a white frilled front and plain gold earrings. She considered only plain jewelry good taste, and although she had precious old things, much treasured by the James family, she never wore them. She never wore rings or other jewelry, except earrings, and why she wore these, she said, was "because her ears had been pierced for them and she must fill the holes."

Paul had never known his aunt to be in the wrong about anything. On several occasions when he was a little boy he had been obliged to apologise to her for something rude he had done in her presence, and even then the ordeal had been worse than tooth extraction; but for years apologies had not been indulged in by any member of the family,—certainly such a proceeding was entirely foreign to Arabella's nature. Therefore, Paul was more than astonished to have his aunt meet him in the hall the following morning, and while in manner and tone retaining the James dignity, say:

"I have since thought, Paul, that you were ill last night, and instead of speaking to you as I did, and as any one would have under the circumstances, I might have shown better judgment had I insisted that you take some pills. I trust that you had sense

enough to do this, and as a consequence feel better this morning."

After thus saying she immediately turned and, without waiting for a reply, walked into the dining-room. As he followed her he recovered from his surprise.

"Yes, Aunt, I took some very bitter pills last night, and am quite better this morning, thanks."

"I thought you would have enough sense to—what—no breakfast?" as he pushed the plates away.

"No, Aunt, only coffee. I hope it's strong," Paul answered her—but another Paul—one with whom she was not familiar.

"He must have been very sick to be so changed," she thought. His voice was crisp and harsh, and his glance almost too alert.

"No, Aunt," he reiterated, "only coffee. Those pills call for just good, strong coffee in the morning. No—no food at all."

"I never heard of such pills," she said, rather lamely.

"No, they're just for very special troubles. One couldn't stand many of them, but they do the trick, Aunt."

They remained silent as he drank his coffee until Arabella, who had evidently been doing some hard thinking during the hours of the night, spoke again.

"It would be well, I think, Paul, for you to get

married soon. I have tried to do my duty to you and maintain the dignity becoming this home for many years. You need a wife now, Paul—every man your age needs a wife. You have spoken to me on several occasions of your intended marriage with Miss Molson, and——"

"Aunt," Paul spoke, in a sharp, cutting voice, "will you kindly listen to me one moment. Listen well, please, for this is the only time I ever intend referring to this subject. You are the only woman who will ever preside over this house. I will never marry—and kindly never refer to anything I have ever said regarding the young lady you have just named, and never again mention her name in my hearing." He paused to finish his coffee, and as he left the room, continued, "I will dine at the club, Aunt, as this will be a very busy week, so please do not wait up for me. Good morning."

"My! my!" said Arabella to herself after he had gone. "What has happened to Paul? If she has broken the engagement, she is not worth regretting, and if he has, why is he so upset? What did he mean about the pills? What disease can he have? Why is he dining all week at the club? What excitement! Not since his father's death have I been so upset. I feel quite unnatural. I hope nothing is going to happen. He looked as though he hadn't slept, but perhaps it was the pills he took. What strange pills—I fear he will wear himself out as his

poor father did—and it is said," added Arabella as she rose from her chair at the table and straightened out her black taffeta, "that he is the greatest surgeon on this continent to-day."

CHAPTER V

BECAUSE of their straitened financial position, Mrs. Molson and Virginia had decided to rent their house. It seemed that they could not bear to part with it altogether. They had disposed of so much in recent years that had been precious to them that their little home now seemed the only little bit of the past in their possession, and in it were rare treasures of other days; those earlier years when smiling fortune had showered her gifts upon them.

Mrs. Molson, though still confined to her room, was somewhat better. On this April morning she sat comfortably wrapped in the armchair by her bedroom window, looking out into a world of spring, trees budding, birds singing, and sunshine—everywhere but in her own heart. There, dark shadows of coming disaster drove all the sunbeams away.

Virginia, her beautiful face pale, and her eyes with a new sadness in them, sat beside her mother sewing. They had discussed the matter of renting the house until there seemed nothing more to say. A larger question loomed up before them and Virginia waited a fitting moment to mention it.

"Well," her mother concluded, after a moment's

pause, "there seems nothing else for us to do but rent it, and you had better see about it this afternoon, Virginia. I do hope you will make it clear that we want no children, for the furniture would be all scratched up by them. I could not bear to see my beautiful things ruined, for they mean much to me—all I have left of what was once the days of our happiness."

"Those things didn't make us happy, mother," Virginia spoke quietly. "It is the heart that makes us happy or miserable. We have the memory of those days when we were together. As time goes by life becomes just memory, doesn't it? If the memory is of happiness we are happy, and if of sadness we are sad, and naturally those things which have been associated with all the events of our lives mean memories to us, don't they?"

"Yes, yes," agreed Mrs. Molson, irritably, "but I hardly catch your meaning. These rare pieces of furniture and the paintings which I have been able to save from the heap of ruin of the past few years, I prize, because those years were the best of my life. We had money then—we hadn't the shame of poverty staring us in the face as we have now—and we had many friends."

"Fair weather friends, mother," the girl interposed. "They were not real friends."

"Nevertheless, they were friends—and my life was happy then—happier than it can ever be again. What have I to live for now? Nothing but gloom

ahead—no home, no money; what will become of us? If you only hadn't quarrelled with——"

"Mother," Virginia looked up indignantly, "please——"

"Very well, then—I'll not mention it," Mrs. Molson conceded, "but the question has to be answered. What will we do after the house is rented and we are on the street?"

"The situation is hardly as tragic as that. I have been thinking it all over and have something to suggest. Could you not accept Aunt Ann's invitation for the summer?"

"My! my!" exclaimed the invalid, "I thought that had been settled. Ann only asked me out of pity, and I'd rather not go. Why do you continue to bother me with it, Virginia?"

"I fear it is the only thing to do, mother. We can't afford to indulge in much pride just now."

"Ann knows how little we have, and I will suffer humiliation there. Oh! oh! will my poor soul never be freed from trouble?"

"You can be happy there, if you will, mother," Virginia said firmly. "Aunt Ann is kindness itself, and, anyway, it seems the only thing to do."

"Very well," complained the invalid with a sigh. "I suppose it will have to come to that. I will suffer in silence a little longer, but"—and here her voice broke into a sob—"I pray that it will soon be over. I have nothing to live for; everything is gone from my life, and my heart is heavy."

"Do cheer up," said Virginia, endeavouring as she had always done to comfort her mother when this selfish grief overpowered her. "There are good times coming for us. When I get something to do and send you a nice fat cheque every month, then won't the sun shine?—and perhaps in the fall we can afford a flat together—then, dear, frail, little mother, that happiness we seem to have lost sight of for a while may come back to us."

"It may," wearily sighed her mother, "but I think it has gone forever. Besides, what do you intend doing?"

"Jean promised to drop in this morning and we will talk it over together. Don't worry, mother. You know what splendid ideas Jean has, so leave it to us. Try to believe that there is a silver lining to every cloud."

In this way the invalid had been comforted for years by a daughter who had learned very early to bury her own sorrow, drawing strength for the task from herself alone, asking no sympathy from a mother who demanded all of hers and gave little in return.

Jean Adams and Virginia had been friends since childhood, and though Jean was married the friendship remained the same.

After she arrived and they were seated in the bright little sunroom, and the plans regarding the renting of the house had been discussed, Virginia opened the question of greatest concern to her.

"And now," she said, "that mother has decided to go to Aunt Ann's, the one huge question remains to be answered—What will I do?"

"Come and stay with me," her friend coaxed. "Howard would love to have you and we could have some good times together."

"Thank you," Virginia replied seriously, "I can't —though I'd like very much to. I have to earn my living some way, for I will have to support mother and myself always."

"Not always," Jean interrupted, smiling. "Some day——"

"No, I told you that nothing like that could ever be for me now. That's over—forever." Then she added in a lighter tone, "I've got to learn to paddle my own canoe—so there's the question—what will I do?"

"Perhaps father could get some clerical work for you," Jean suggested. "If you had ever kept your father's books it would have been of great help to you now, but without training of any kind it's rather difficult to know what to suggest. However, I'll speak to father and Howard—perhaps between them they may be able to think of something. If your mother had allowed you to study the violin as you always wished, how useful the knowledge would be to you now."

"Yes, but all thought of music was out of the question because of mother's nerves—practising always worried her. In fact," explained Virginia,

"there is so little that I can do, except look after mother and make people comfortable, that something to earn a living at seems hard to suggest."

"What about nursing?"

"Yes, but what would happen to mother while I took my training?"

"That's so," agreed Jean. Then, after a moment's silence, "However, that reminds me, did you hear about Dr. Paul?"

"No," said Virginia, looking out of the window.

"He performed a very critical operation on a bushman who had been delayed three days in the woods, and whose case was consequently very serious. The wound had become septic, and I believe Dr. Paul became infected from a little splinter of the bone cutting through the glove and piercing his finger. Howard says that there is great concern about it. It seems he paid no attention to it, although he must have known, but each day went on with the most serious operations—really doing some wonderful things—although, dear, I think that he was working under stimulant all the time. However, he is in such a condition now that he has to lay up completely, and Dr. Simpson thinks there is a question as to whether his arm can be saved or not."

Virginia had not spoken nor turned from the window. The colour had mounted to her face and she held her hands tightly clasped. "Which arm is it, Jean?" she asked in a low voice.

"The right one," her friend answered. "He had

to be taken home yesterday, although even then he didn't want to give up. He has two nurses and his aunt looking after him. The aunt told Howard that she knew something would happen to him, as he has been ill for ten days, aside altogether from the poisoning."

"I have never seen his aunt. Is she a kind person, Jean?" Virginia questioned.

"I know her but slightly, although Howard and the Doctor have been friends for years. She is a very haughty woman, but the only mother he ever knew, Virginia. It's rather hard for him, isn't it?"

Virginia made no answer but kept looking out of the window, although Jean knew that she saw nothing. "It means so much to him—the loss of his right arm. Howard says it will never be any use again, even though they save it."

Virginia's voice trembled. "Is that true?" she asked.

"Yes," her friend replied, "and father says that, great as his father was, Paul is even now surpassing him in surgical skill. This last week alone was enough to make him famous. Virginia," her friend continued eagerly, "couldn't you——"

"No," the girl drew herself up proudly, although tears shone in her eyes. "I can't, Jean—I'm too proud—I'm sorry—oh, so sorry—my heart aches, but I can't."

"Perhaps if you just enquired, or would write a note it would help," her friend continued to plead.

"No—no—I must not—and I will not," she replied.

"I'll keep you informed about him," Jean said in parting, but Virginia did not appear to hear.

CHAPTER VI

"WELL, Aunt Arabella," Paul said, one day after the nurses had been dismissed and Arabella busied herself about the sitting-room, where, with his arm in a sling, he paced nervously up and down, "it's going to be quite an ornament, isn't it?"

"What do you mean, Paul?" Arabella enquired.

"This lifeless arm of mine. It will always just dangle—dangle at my side. I think I'll put a bell on it."

"Paul, you shock me—you speak so bitterly—besides," she said half in question, "it's going to be all right before long."

"Now, good lady, be not deceived—for it is not. I know that the muscles are useless now, and always will be forever—and ever—and ever, Aunt." And Paul strode up to the window, and with his left arm flung wide the curtain, while the warm June sunlight shone in upon him, revealing more clearly the new hard lines about his mouth, that pain had brought there, and the quick restless glance of the eyes that had always been noticeable for their sparkle of fun and good humour. "But it will make a good ornament, if you will make some silk frills for it," he

continued, as Arabella stared in astonishment at him, "though a number of little bells might be better—one on each finger. Perhaps I might learn to dangle a tune with them to amuse your visitors, Aunt. What do you say to that?"

"Paul, I am shocked," said Arabella. "I don't understand you."

"Neither do I—that's the joke of it," and his laugh made Arabella shiver. "But I'm determined to make a study of myself, Aunt, and if I discover anything worth while, I'll let you know."

"Life is getting to be very strange," said Arabella. "Everything seems puzzling now, and you are the strangest puzzle of all, Paul."

"Well now, about life, Aunt, I agree with you. It is a puzzle—but no—let me think a moment. Why, Aunt—life's a glorious thing. Think of it—life for me, for instance. Here am I, doomed to carry this ornament of mine around dangling by my right side all the days of my life. I will dress it up and put bells on it, and it will make the children laugh. If they don't laugh while they are children, when are they going to laugh? In a little while life has the laugh on them. It has the laugh on me now. When I listen I can hear it cackle. I tell you, Aunt," and Paul turned quickly and faced her, "I am going to get the better of life. I am going to get the better of this thing that hounds me. Defeat and my father's enemy, which is also mine, have schemed together to get me, but, by Lucifer, Aunt, it will be

some game. I'll give them a hot chase." His voice had been sharp and determined, and Arabella had listened to him in amazement, but now a pathos which was almost pain crept into it, as he continued, "You never felt, did you, that the bottom had fallen out of the world—that suddenly all had grown dark, and from out the darkness sweet voices called to lure you into their power—only to debase you; to call you to a peace that in the awakening would be only bitterness. But, then," he spoke slowly, "is it worth it? I am useless now. What can a surgeon do without his right hand? Just when the sun rose high in the heavens in one instant—this—she failed me—now no one cares. Is it worth the fight?"

Arabella could hardly hear him, as he sat huddled up in his chair, his head low and his eyes closed. "She thought I wasn't worth a little more trust." Suddenly he got up and, apparently unconscious of Arabella's presence, exclaimed passionately, "I'll show the woman—I'll show her what I am worth."

"Paul, you're crazy." Arabella was master of herself once more and this nonsense had to be stopped. "I'll telephone for Dr. Simpson. You need attention."

"You telephone at your peril, Aunt." Paul stood beside her, and it seemed to Arabella that he looked then much as his father had looked on the morning of some very critical operation, when life and death, and reputation, hung in the balance. "I take my orders henceforth from Dr. Paul James, still sur-

geon in mind, if not in act, and still master of himself and his own destiny. I have just decided, Aunt, that neither life nor any of its infernal spies is going to have the chance to down me in the dark. I'll get the best of them all. There is nothing crazy about that decision. Sorry if I have worried you, though —but after this if you can't stand it—leave the room."

This was a new note, "Leave the room." Arabella had never been so spoken to before. To talk to Paul now in his present mood would be useless, she would say nothing. "Leave the room," he had said. Arabella could feel the James pride mount to the roots of her hair, and her whole body seemed bristling with it. Her chin mounted higher and her neck seemed stretched, as she rose proudly to her feet and with a swish of her taffeta skirts walked slowly out of the room.

Paul sat down again in the big armchair by the window and closed his eyes, while his lips were drawn tightly together, and his brow puckered into a scowl. Occasionally he tapped restlessly on the arm of the chair with the fingers of his left hand; while outside the shadow of the house fell across the street as the sun slowly crept into the west.

Arabella had gone into the adjoining room, where she paced up and down several times, and then sat down. She took up her knitting and started to knit, but she could not quiet the tumult rising and swelling within her, so she got up and began walking back

and forth—with each turn her taffeta skirts swished with the pride that could not be quelled. After a while she heard Paul's voice.

"Aunt, come here," he called.

"Come here," she said to herself, "indeed!" and she did not answer.

"Aunt, come here," he called again.

Still no reply from Arabella. "Indeed!" she kept remarking to herself as she paced back and forth.

"Aunt, come here at once," the voice called louder this time.

"Perhaps he is sick," she said to herself, as she gathered up her knitting and went to him.

"Sit down; I want to talk to you."

"I will stand," she answered without looking at him.

"Sit down," he commanded, and she sat down.

"Now, Aunt, I'm going to spring a surprise on you. I'm going to close the house." He waited. Was it with a spirit of defiance for the effect of his words, or was he just trying to shock her? Whatever it was he was disappointed.

"Very well," she answered without emotion.

"Yes," he continued, "I am going to close the house and open up Fernholme."

Fernholme was the old James home at Ferndale, which after the father's death had become the property of Paul. When a little boy he had spent every summer with his grandparents there, and it had always been the one place he loved above all others.

Arabella's tastes did not lie in that direction. She did not love the country. To her the solitude was loneliness, the quiet and peace of it only monotony; the cornfields and gardens without interest. As a girl she had lived there, but had never liked it, and now much preferred the life of the city. Her father, Paul's grandfather, a judge of the Supreme Court, had made this beautiful country place his special hobby. Both he and his wife had been fond lovers of nature and had taken special pride in the lawns and gardens, sparing no expense in their efforts to make of this country home an ideal beauty spot.

Arabella thought for a moment. She had no desire to go to the country, especially with Paul alone —as he was now—and she would not.

"I will not go with you," she replied with a finality that could not be mistaken.

"You will spend the summer with Harriet" (Harriet was Arabella's favourite married niece). "You have promised to visit her for years, and now's your chance." Paul spoke as though he were dictating to a stenographer.

"I could remain here," Arabella suggested, although she did not seem amazed at his order.

"No, I want to shut it up. I don't like the house now and may never come back to it. I want to get away from it—away from the smiling friends who pity me—away from the busy, useful, active life, that, after crippling me, calls to me—then mocks me. Away to the quiet and peace of the drowsy days

and starry nights where I can think alone; where I can grow bitter and gradually harden myself to a life without ambition, at the same time slowly killing in my heart what is left of faith and—yes, Aunt," he exclaimed with passion, "I want to get hard so that I won't feel—so that I won't suffer, and I am going out there to take the treatment—alone."

"You can't go alone," Arabella replied with decision. She had come to the conclusion that Paul had to be accepted just as he was, whether she understood him or not. She thought to herself, that he was so queer that she might reasonably expect anything.

"George is there; he is all that is necessary," Paul said.

"Yes, but if you recollect," Arabella continued, "in the last report George sent you he stated that he would like some improvements made to his house, as he had married the school-teacher and the place needed papering and other things,—I have forgotten the particulars. Of course," she went on in a haughty tone, "now that the man is married, it is not at all likely that he could look after the farm and his own house, do all your work and keep the big house in order as well, at least"—this with a snap of her dark eyes—"I have never met a man yet who could do more than one thing at a time, much less three, and my confidence in their ability has not increased of late."

"Thanks, Aunt. As usual you are entirely correct,

especially in your judgment of the opposite sex. Marvellous, isn't it? how you hit the nail on the head every time. Of course, as you say, George will be of little use now, I suppose. Any man who marries is a fool. No, I don't want his wife about, that's sure. I'll take a man out to keep the place decent for me."

"Most unsatisfactory. Most unsatisfactory," commented Arabella. "It would never do. What does a man know about keeping house? Why, the furniture and fixings there are of great value. A man puttering about would have everything ruined in no time. No—I must put my foot down. It must not be allowed." Arabella in turn became defiant. If she had no great love for the lonely old place, she at least understood the value of the inside, and all those precious things must be looked after. Everything was safe so long as it remained closed up and George there to guard it, but now that it was to be opened it must be opened properly and everything inside treated with due respect. What did a man know about housekeeping? "Nonsense—pure nonsense!"

"Paul," she continued with great firmness, "it must not be."

"Well, well," he answered irritably, "suggest something, suggest something. I will not have women bothering me. I tell you, I don't want the sight of a woman about. Now, what's to be done?"

This was a problem for Arabella. She stopped

knitting and thought for a moment. Paul eyed her with impatience.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, "can't you think of something? I want to get out there right away—next week, not later. My Lord! how sick I am of this. You will write to George at once, Aunt, and tell him I quite forgot about his letter regarding his affairs, marriage and all that—but to go ahead, and fix up what he wants—only women—tut—" and he snapped his fingers—"I would not give that for them."

"That's neither here nor there," remarked Arabella quite coolly, "the question up for consideration is one of servants."

"Servants?" echoed Paul.

"Yes, servants," said Arabella. "The place has to be looked after. If you do not wish it for yourself, out of respect for what it means to the whole family, you must have it taken proper care of. Now," she continued, as she straightened out her taffeta skirts and resumed her knitting, "if you wish I will attend to that matter for you."

"Just the thing," he agreed. "But see here, Aunt," and he got up and paced up and down excitedly, "I mean what I say—I don't want to see a woman about the place. If they can do the work and keep out of my way, all right—but I don't want even to see them. Do you understand? Just that exactly; I don't want to see them. Make that clear to any one you get, please."

"You will find that they will have no desire to disobey that order," Arabella commented drily.

"Good, Aunt, you think that?" Paul laughed harshly. "They won't want to see me, eh? I'll drive terror into their tender little hearts. Bah! tender hearts. A woman hasn't a heart. A woman——"

But Arabella had left the room. He had said, "If you can't stand it, leave the room," and she had.

That night in his room, as Paul took the little picture of his angel mother and placed it on his desk before him he was not afraid to look into her eyes. "Mother," his heart cried out to her, "you are all I have left. You loved me and I will never dishonour that love. Father failed you—but mother —dear mother—I will not fail you. So help me, God."

CHAPTER VII

DURING the weeks of Paul's illness Virginia had been kept informed of his condition from time to time by Jean, who seemed always to take her interest for granted.

The day when it was known that Paul's arm could be saved Jean had hurried to her friend to give her the news in detail (for Howard had had it from Dr. Paul himself). Virginia had evinced little concern. "Yes, is that so?" she had remarked, "but let us talk about something else."

"Why, I thought you would be glad," Jean answered.

"Why should I be glad? He is nothing to me."

"Nothing to you, Virginia? I thought you liked to hear of him."

"No, Jean, I am not really interested."

This attitude of cold indifference lately assumed by Virginia was most puzzling to those who knew her best. Besides, into it had crept a cynicism which sounded a harsh note in a character heretofore only kind and charitable.

Mrs. Molson had finally consented to accept Ann's invitation for the summer, and with this mental decision her physical strength had suddenly improved

long enough, at any rate, to take the journey and place herself under the tender care of Ann.

Virginia, whose plans were still uncertain, with nothing but a few faint hopes to build on with regard to a position Jean's father had recommended, remained in the house until the new tenant should take possession. After that she had promised to stay with Jean until she could secure something to do. Jean arrived to see her the day after Mrs. Molson's departure.

"We don't agree with the idea of you staying here alone," she said, as they walked in the June sunlight through the little garden, observing the beauty and strength of the budding plants and shrubs.

"Why not? I am perfectly safe," Virginia answered, more lightly than had been her wont of late. "Besides, I need this quiet for a few days. I want to reconstruct a bit. I want to look out upon the hills and fields and get the right perspective, and into the glory of the evening sunset and keep that glory in my vision when later the night shadows creep over it all. I want to let the sunlight of these beautiful days burn into my heart, fading out the drabs that have stolen in lately. The old picture I had painted of what my life would be is just a daub now. Just a daub on the canvas; the colour and beauty of it were only dreams and illusions. I begin a new picture soon, and there will be no dreams and illusions to colour it. I want it to be life—just as it is—just as it will be for me, and I want, just in

these few days alone, here in the sunlight, to prepare the canvas for the new picture."

They stood beside a tall rose bush and hundreds of its tiny pink buds were beginning to open to the sun.

"Roses are dreams," the girl continued, as she lifted some drooping branches and fastened them to the supporting frame, "just dreams—fragrant and beautiful for a season—but they fade—the petals drop off one by one. My dream was a rose—the petals have dropped off."

"Yes," Jean interrupted eagerly, "but another rose springs out of the same stem—and not only one but many more. The plant does not stop flowering because one blossom dies. So why should you have no more dreams because one dream has vanished?"

The girl did not answer for a moment, but into her eyes had stolen that far-away look as though some vision had crossed her sight, obliterating for the moment the summer day about her.

"Yes, but I am the one blossom variety, I guess, Jean."

"I don't know of any one blossom variety," her friend answered softly. "Even so," she mused, almost to herself, "perhaps you only think the petals have fallen off."

Her friend did not answer, and Jean spoke of other things—the position she hoped could be se-

cured for Virginia, and then of her own personal plans for the summer.

"I heard something rather interesting to-day," she remarked, as they entered the house. "Howard came home quite excited about it."

Since Virginia had claimed to have no interest in even hearing about Paul, Jean had not mentioned him, and now she rather hesitated to open the subject again. However, she took her courage in her hands and continued, "Yes, something interesting about Dr. Paul." Then she waited a moment, but Virginia said nothing, and she went on. "He is going to close his house here and open up Fernholme, that beautiful old place that has belonged to the James family for years. Howard says that it will be the very best thing for him. I believe he already has had the man who runs the place for him come in to see him several times. Then Howard says that it is very amusing about the servants. It seems that Arabella has taken it upon herself to secure help for him and Paul is very peculiar. He doesn't want to see them about—wishes them to stay out of his sight entirely. He thought a man-servant would do, but Arabella insists upon having the place opened up in good order and cared for properly. You know that it is a very charming place. The house is rich in the old-fashioned sense of furnishing, and the gardens used to be considered the most beautiful in the country. According to Howard, Arabella is having her time getting help that will

promise never to look Paul's way and obliterate themselves so entirely that the Master of the house will never so much as catch a glimpse of them."

Virginia's face became flushed as her friend continued her narrative, and now, as she paused, turned rather eagerly to her: "Why does he not wish to see them?" she asked.

"Because they are women, I suppose."

"Oh," exclaimed Virginia, looking out of the window again.

"Yes," went on Jean, "he has no use for women, although he has said nothing of that nature to Howard—but Arabella, in her distress, confided in Howard, and, my dear, think of it,—asked his help. In fact, requested that he enquire of me if I knew of any reliable woman to take full charge of the place and to oversee the servants, that everything be looked after properly. Paul says he will have nothing to do with the servants, and Arabella won't go herself. She says she couldn't live in the country all summer, the monotony and quiet of it would distress her; besides, when Paul is so queer she thinks he is better alone. She plans to visit a niece whom she has not seen for years. Quite a problem, isn't it?"

Virginia did not answer or comment in any way, but very quietly walked over to the big bay window and stood there looking out into the June sunshine, while the robins in the tree-tops chirruped and called to each other. Spring had come, with its song of

hope; and now the dawn of summer fulfilment tuned the world to a song of love and joy, which robin redbreast sang to his mate and the sun whispered into the opening hearts of the flowers.

Jean rocked herself in the chair by the open window, and waited for Virginia to speak. She hummed softly to herself, for song was in the air, a song of promise.

"Have you found any one to suit her, Jean?"

To Jean the question was a surprise. "Why, no, I have hardly thought of it. Why do you ask? Do you know of any one?"

"Yes, I think I do." Virginia took the chair beside her as Jean looked up bewildered. What was it? The old happiness seemed to flush her cheeks and shine in her eyes. "How do you think," she went on eagerly, "she would have to apply? Would Arabella have to see her, or how would it be, Jean?"

"Why, Virginia, what has happened? I don't understand."

"Never mind, dear," the girl rambled on; "just tell me how it would have to be done."

"I can find out."

Just then Virginia whispered into Jean's ear, "I have an idea so utterly fearful and ridiculous, I must tell you, but don't laugh at me or make fun of me or anything else—promise."

"I promise," said Jean, smiling and impatient. "Proceed, please."

"I told you," Virginia blushed deeply, "that a

didn't care—well, I do. No—not in the way you mean—the dream has gone—the petals have fallen from the rose—but I am sorry—oh, so sorry for him, and there will be no one out there to care." Then her voice became very low, "Jean, I want to be near him—I want to do things for him—even if he doesn't know. I want to be near—that's all."

"But, Virginia," Jean stammered, stupid with surprise, "I don't see how——"

"Neither do I, but some way we can manage it, but first tell me, do you understand?"

"Do I understand?" the other replied with spirit, as she drew the girl's arm about her, "do I understand? Well, I should just say that I do. You give your mother the best love of your heart. What has she given you? Sometimes not even understanding. Still you continue to idolise and cherish her, filling her life with rare devotion."

"You should not say that," Virginia interrupted.

"Perhaps not, but I want you to know how well I understand. Then you loved him with all your heart, and he failed you—but you can't be harsh any more. You want to just keep on giving of yourself—as you do to your mother. That's the reason —now, don't I understand?"

"You do," whispered Virginia. "You have always understood."

"But what I can't see, is how the thing can be managed," Jean exclaimed, relieving the tension. "Have you ever seen Arabella? Has she ever seen

you? If he should recognise you, what then? You will have to change your name. Oh, dear!" fussed Jean in some excitement, "it would be interesting now, wouldn't it?"

"One question at a time," said Virginia, becoming animated. "I have never seen Arabella, and so far as I know, she has never seen me. She was to have called several times, but something always interfered and her visit was postponed. I would see to it that he never saw me. Isn't that his wish—never to see any one around? He wouldn't be peeking about trying to catch sight of me. Yes, I would have to change my name. Let me see," as she paused to think a moment, "I could be dressed in black—a young widow."

"Yes, and you could be peculiar," suggested Jean, her brain now fully alive to the situation, "a man-hater, so to speak. Husband treated you badly and now you hate all men—capable and trustworthy—but insist upon having full management—and wish never to come in contact with him—will stand for no interference—you want a free hand—must have two maids or cannot undertake it—also a part of the house and garden for yourself—where no man may enter, or even look in the direction. It's great, Virginia! It will be fun, won't it?"

"Don't make it all into fun—please, Jean. I'm not doing it for fun."

"I know," laughed the other, "but it will be fun, anyhow. It can't help but be."

"It won't be fun for me," said Virginia, not yet able to see the humour in it.

"I will speak to Arabella and strongly recommend you," went on Jean. "Have known you all my life —your husband a poor, worthless fellow—though a gentleman—but no good; you a lady, disowned by your people—now without means—loves the country—accustomed to manage anything. Do you know, dear, I think I could write stories. Look how easy all this nonsense comes into my head. However, while I am in the mood, and if you are quite serious, I think I'll phone Arabella now."

"I am serious, Jean, and am praying that it may come true."

"Well, Howard said that it all had to be arranged within a few days, so there is no time to be lost." Then ensued one of those telephone conversations so one-sided and yet so curious to the person looking on.

"Yes, Miss James, Mrs. Adams is speaking."

"Yes, Mr. Adams told me of your predicament."

"Is that so? It must be distressing, I am sure. Have you secured any one?"

"Yes, I think I can. I know of a very splendid person whom I think would be just what you want—oh, yes, I can thoroughly recommend her—have known her all my life—a perfect lady—but most unfortunate."

"Oh, no—no, indeed" (with emphasis), "nothing like that."

"Yes, a good family. It was this way: she mar-

ried a gentleman, clever but dissipated. He treated her fearfully. Her people would not recognise her. He died, leaving her nothing—but she is very proud and very peculiar."

"Yes, yes, they might get along well because of that."

"She despises men."

"I understand. That could be arranged, I think."

"Yes, the house is large; I know the gables—exactly so. Yes, she would want full responsibility."

"Oh, no, I am glad to be of service—yes, thoroughly recommend her—I could drop in to-morrow and tell you about her. No, I fear not. She lives in the suburbs. Yes, thoroughly reliable."

"Not at all. Is he any better? I am so glad—yes, indeed, it will be just the thing for him."

"Good-bye."

Virginia was white. "Do you think it's right, Jean, to make up such a story—do you think harm can come of it?"

"Yes, it is right," Jean replied with decision, anxious to assure herself. "It is right, yes, it *is* right, and no harm can come of it. Silly, we will see what may come of it."

"Not what you think," Virginia replied, surmising her friend's meaning. "Not that. If I thought that, I would not go. What did she say?"

"It was interesting, Virginia. She seemed more than grateful to me, but at first very doubtful of

you, and then finally accepted my recommendation fully, and thinks you will be the very one. Paul would never wish to see you, as he hates all women, so I think you'll be free from recognition. She has two maids who will go out with you. She was glad that you were queer, too, and thinks you will just suit in that respect. She will take the maids out there, and wanted to know if she could see you tomorrow. I said that as you lived in the suburbs I feared that I could not get word to you. Of course, I will see her, and inform her that I will drive you out and meet her there. How will that do? Trust me, I will arrange it all right. Am I not proving capable?"

"You're a wonder, Jean, but then you always were."

"Mine is the easy part; yours will be the hard part to play."

"Yes," Virginia thought to herself, as after Jean left, she sat alone in the twilight, the crimson sun casting its subdued glory into the room, and flooding her soul with the promise of a bright, new day. "Yes, mine will be the hard part to play—but just being near him—perhaps to help—to guard—to make it a bit easier for him," for now she knew and understood that he was going out there to fight alone, and "he must win."

"Oh, Gracious, Heavenly Father," she prayed, "give him strength to fight and to win, and grant

me a little part in it. Grant that I may be near him. Give me faith and wisdom and trust, that if he weaken at any time my strength may go out to him, and grant him in the end—the victory."

CHAPTER VIII

"WELL, Aunt," Paul enquired of Arabella, as she entered his room while the morning sunshine flooded it with glory. He was reading the paper, but looked up expectantly. "Have you trapped your victim yet?"

"She will be your victim—not mine," came the quick response.

"Very true, Aunt, yet there never was captor who demanded so little of his victim's presence as I will demand of this unfortunate woman. Did you explain quite clearly the terms—instantaneous disappearance whenever I loom into sight—no interviews at any time about anything—keep to herself entirely and to her own apartments. Did you explain all that?"

"Yes," said Arabella, and there was a humorous glint in her eyes.

"Will she consent to agree to the terms?"

"Oh," said Arabella, "this person would consent to go under no other conditions."

"Ugh," grunted Paul, in disgust. "What's the matter with her?"

"She has your complaint—she hates all men."

"Just the person for me, then. I'll have no bother with her."

"No," went on Arabella, the situation becoming amusing to her, "she wishes you to understand that she is to be responsible for the house, and that you are to confine yourself to your own domain entirely. She does not wish you to even look to her side of the house, or lift your eyes in her direction should she be within your vision—though in the far distance. Paul," concluded his aunt with decision, "this woman is a match for you."

"Have you engaged her?"

"Yes, I did so to-day. Mrs. Adams strongly recommends her, and is to drive her out to meet me there to-morrow. She is a widow without means—though, I understand, a lady. Her husband treated her badly."

"All bosh, Aunt—all bosh. A woman of that kind would make a man's life unbearable. He drank, I suppose; that's the popular story. I expect the poor brute drank because he couldn't stand life otherwise. That's the one kind of a woman a man needs to pray to be delivered from."

"Why," she remarked, "she seems to have been more sinned against than sinning."

"Don't you believe it, Aunt. Most women are enough to drive a man crazy. They expect everything of him and give nothing in return. A woman is purely selfish—absolutely vain—essentially stupid—and domineering. She——"

"Paul," Arabella interrupted with dignity, "I wish to speak."

"Proceed," he commanded, glaring at her, then at the paper before him.

"I will go out to-morrow with this 'staff' of yours, and remain part of the day in order to arrange to my satisfaction matters which I may consider essential. I will return in the evening, and then your retreat will be ready for your immediate possession. If you will give me exact instructions regarding the rooms each one is to occupy—the space in the garden each may stand on—the part of the earth each may be allowed to walk on—the trees and allotment of sky each will be permitted to gaze upon—the number of——"

"Aunt," Paul spoke with a slight sneer, "you wax eloquent; your irony is superb. Another experience of this kind would make a public speaker of you."

Arabella rose to her feet. "I consider this whole matter perfectly disgraceful. Never in the history of the James family has such a thing happened before. Never was there a James so completely given over to the dictates of a wild and unreasoned conscience. The kings of the olden days did not display a greater foolishness in the humouring of their mad and unwholesome desires. I have secured your help for you, Paul, as I promised, and I will see them safely there, but mark me" (this mode of speech was not quite natural to Arabella, although she considered it absolutely necessary now), "I will do noth-

ing more for you. You are a man and have chosen your own path, and I tell you I will not have my pride humiliated again as it has been during the last few days. This woman, whoever she is, will have entire charge. She may run things to ruin, I know not. With you rests the responsibility—but remember—the house you and this strange woman will occupy together is the house of your ancestors—the birthplace of your father—and the one place your mother loved above all others—for this last reason, if for no other, it behooves you to see that it is not dishonoured."

"Excellent, Aunt, excellent," Paul exclaimed, as when she had finished he looked up and watched her walk majestically out of the room. "Just a moment, just a moment," he called, and she turned to face him. "I wish to thank you for what you have done. Your heart is all right, though your tongue is bitter—and if your words could hurt I would be a mass of wounds long ere this. But understand please—you are not the only member of the James family from whom the spirit of pride has not departed. It is that spirit that leads me there." He rose as he spoke and faced her, "And it will be that pride which will keep me there until," his voice sank low, "the morning breaks. It is because my mother loved the place so that I am going there. Her spirit may be nearer there, and while I live it will never be dishonoured."

Arabella, true to her word, spent the greater part of the following day initiating Paul's staff into their

new responsibilities, and with his written order in hand she directed this and that, reading out the new laws in tones of true James dignity. She was determined that though the orders were those of a fool she would show no sign of weakness in the task allotted to her.

Virginia had adopted the name of Mrs. Blair, thinking that one name was as good as another when it was assumed, and on her shoulders had fallen the responsibility of seeing that all these orders were carried out to the letter.

CHAPTER IX

VIRGINIA had been settled two days at Fernholme when Paul drove out to take possession. He had sent word with Arabella to the effect that he would not be out for two days. This delay was granted in order that the women should have sufficient time in which to look over the place and that their curiosity might be satisfied; that for the remainder of the summer they should be content to remain in the quarters allotted to them.

After Arabella's departure Sarah Smith, one of the maids engaged, refused to remain, and George had to drive her to the station. The restrictions were not to her liking. Virginia hoped that the same desire for flight would not seize the other girl, Mary. However, Mary had a love for nature and also a keen sense of humour, and Virginia soon felt that she would not desert her.

Mabel, George's wife, attracted by Virginia, had consented to help in any way with the management or practical work of the house, and with such a reliable woman with whom to share the burden, Virginia felt that already fate was favouring her.

The place had at once attracted and fascinated her. The massive old trees, the well-kept lawns,

and beautiful old-fashioned gardens, which though falling far short of their possible beauty had not been neglected, presented a very alluring picture to her.

Her apartments, in the left gable, consisted of a bedroom, bathroom and sitting-room. A door from the sitting-room opened on to a narrow winding stair leading down into a little rose-garden, in the centre of which was a sundial, and in one corner a quaint old-fashioned summer-house. Just the kind of a garden one would dream of. A little gate led out from it on to the drive at the east side of the house. It was a beauty spot by itself, and seemed to Virginia that first night, as she stood by the sundial and looked up into the stars, a place of sweet rest.

To her the new responsibilities assumed a very serious character and the road ahead appeared a succession of pitfalls and shadows into which her vision could not penetrate. To be near—within sight and sound of Paul—and yet compelled to remain unknown—already the secrecy of the thing had become a burden to her. Might he not at any time catch a glimpse of her from a window or notice her in the garden? Seized with this idea, she studied Paul's written orders which Arabella had handed to her, then she went from one to the other of the rooms which he was to occupy, and looked out of their windows to assure herself just what part of her domain could be observed from them. Having decided that she was comparatively free from dis-

covery in this respect her heart ceased its fluttering, and she sat down in her dainty little sitting-room to study again the strange "Rules of the House."

"Woman in charge," she read, "Mrs. Blair by name, is to occupy suite in left gable opening on to rose-garden. Maids, Mary Lee and Sarah Smith by name, to occupy left and right room, respectively, at end of hall in left gable. The rest of the house is to be kept in order, but I alone will occupy it.

"On first floor, library and dining-room opening off hall on right hand, and room in right gable having western exposure.

"On second floor, bedroom on extreme right of hall having western exposure.

"The room in right gable on ground floor overlooking rear gardens and having eastern and southern exposures is to be closed. No one is to enter it on any pretext whatever.

"Hall in right gable is to be used only by me.

"No woman at any time—for any reason whatever—is to enter any part of right gable. Any necessary work there will be attended to by George.

"The women are not to loiter in front or on right side of house, or in right rear—but if necessity demand their passing—let them pass quickly.

"The maids, Mary Lee and Sarah Smith, may have use of left lower balcony opening off left gable, and will remain to left side of house and lawn exclusively.

"Mrs. Blair may have full possession of left rear

rose-garden, and will be expected to find sufficient recreation there.

"The library is to be kept clean—nothing more. My papers or any article of furniture or ornaments are not to be moved except for the purpose of cleaning, and in that case must be returned to former place immediately.

"Nothing is to be changed or moved in my bedroom, except for the purpose of cleaning, and returned to former position immediately.

"My meals are to be served at the following hours, viz.: Breakfast, nine o'clock—Luncheon, one o'clock —Dinner, seven o'clock. This rule is not to be changed for any reason whatever. All meals are to be served as fully as possible before I enter the room. Anything that cannot be placed on the table then will be served later by George.

"No woman is to enter dining-room while I occupy it.

"Work in part of house occupied by me is to be performed and finished during my absence each day. No woman is to enter front hall or any room occupied by me during my presence in house.

"Woman in charge, Mrs. Blair by name, will do all ordering for household. No questions, except of serious import, are to be referred to me. In such a case George will bear the message to me.

"While I am in the house no woman is to sing —or speak in such a tone that the voice would be carried to another part of the house. In short—I

do not wish to see or hear a woman—or in any way feel that she lives under my roof.

"Woman in charge, Mrs. Blair by name, is to be responsible for the slightest omission in the carrying out to the letter of these instructions. She is to inform those under her of the serious import of these instructions, and is to see to it that the rules are not broken."

So the instructions read, and when she had finished Virginia's eyes snapped with the old-time fires of pride and anger. She was to be a prisoner—ordered to remain in her own quarters—"expected to find sufficient recreation there." "Woman in charge" the words ran, "Mrs. Blair by name," all these things stung her deeply with humiliation.

Hers was to be the freedom of a caged animal. Even God's great out-of-doors was denied her. Nowhere except in her little rose-garden could she listen to the birds sing. Just from her window could she catch a glimpse of the setting sun. The place was more beautiful than she had dreamed, and the prison-house had barred windows.

Then when the anger and pride had spent themselves, she took up the document again and her eyes became blurred as she studied the strange, difficult handwriting. It had been written with his left hand. His signature bore almost no resemblance to the bold, free handwriting she had known so well and loved.

The sun was all crimson and gold in the west, and

the shadow was dark on the face of the old sundial while Virginia still sat lost in her dream; and the opening rosebuds in the garden below, with the sweet expectancy of the sun's caress on the morrow, folded their delicate petals a little closer to their hearts, while into the ear of the girl dreaming there some fairy whispered, "Love may be a dream—and a rose —but it is something infinitely more."

CHAPTER X

EVERYTHING looks in good condition, George," Paul remarked, while his trunks were being carried in and he viewed his rooms.

"Yes, sir," George answered in a deep bass voice, which fitted well his six feet of finely developed manhood. "Things look pretty fair. Where do the trunks go?"

"The two small ones upstairs and the others, including the coffin, into the ring wing."

"The coffin?" George stammered.

"Yes, the coffin," Paul replied in much too light a tone. "There is nothing like carrying your coffin with you. The only trouble with that one is that it's full already. No place for me in there—that long box at your feet is a coffin—somebody's coffin—I don't know who's—however, *it's* in there now."

George, though a strong man, paled a little. For years he had known Dr. Paul James, and had respected and honoured him, but this Dr. Paul James whom he had known for the past few weeks was not the same man. That was why he paled a little.

Then Paul looked up and laughed. "Feel creepy, George? You're too soft, man. You'll have to try

my game—the game of growing hard—but enough of this. Lift it up and carry it into my room in the gable. That's to be the laboratory, and 'it,' " pointing to the box, "fits in all right there."

"A skeleton! a skeleton!" exclaimed George, relieved beyond words, the colour again flooding his ruddy cheeks. "A skeleton!" he exclaimed again as he lifted the box and carried it down the hall.

"Yes, a skeleton," Paul remarked as he followed. "Light, isn't it? Nothing but bones—can't always see the bones when they're alive, George, but some people have nothing but bones—no heart—no soul, no humanness, just bones that clank and rattle together. Yes, the door to the right—just on the floor, please. Now, George, in a few days, with your help, I'll have this room fitted up and in order."

"Very well, sir; glad to help you," answered George, not yet ready to make further remark to this stranger.

"Now the large trunks," said Paul as he raised the window blind. "In here, too. Yes, all in here. Have you the key for the room opposite, George?"

"Yes, I have it here," and, taking from his pocket a ring of keys, he handed Paul the one asked for.

"Has any one entered this room during the last few days?"

"No, sir; I locked it as you said—and the women haven't even asked about it."

"Another thing," Paul said, "don't talk women to me. I don't want to hear the word. Understand?"

"The head one seems like the right sort," George ventured to comment. He felt somewhat resentful —for he had just been married and was far from sharing Paul's sentiments in regard to the other sex.

"Seems—they're all seems. They just seem to be this, and seem to be that. It's the foolish man who stops to gaze; the wise rush on praying for deliverance, lest she follow and the end of that man is death, no, not body death, worse than that—soul death. Ever hear of soul death, George?"

"No," the big man answered rather lamely.

Paul did not hear. He was intently studying the strip of carpet at his feet, and as he looked up the hard lines around his mouth became a little sharper drawn. "George, if your wife knows the nature of this opposite room, for my sake, ask her to refrain from mentioning it. Did you draw the window-blinds as I told you before locking the door?"

"I did," said George, much in the same tone of voice as he had replied to the questions in the marriage ceremony.

"I will unpack upstairs now," Paul continued as they went back into the front hall and up the stairs to his room. "If you help me we can get the trunks taken away at once out of the road. Tackle that one, George; hang up the suits and coats in there," motioning to a huge clothespress, "and I will manage this one."

Together they worked in silence, Paul unloading

the smaller articles of apparel and placing them in the drawers.

"Where does this go?" asked George as he came to the bottom of the trunk and held up a bolt of goods done up in heavy wrapping paper.

Paul was just placing very slowly and tenderly the little gold frame with his mother's picture on the dresser before him. He looked up quickly, then noticing the bundle, laughed that harsh laugh Arabella disliked so, and which already sent a shiver through George.

"Oh, that belongs to the long box, George, some rags for the bones. Some day"—he laughed, then resting his glance on the face in the gold frame, he checked himself suddenly—"yes, take it down," he said, the laugh gone from his voice, "and put it on top of the long box. I can manage now. Come up after a little—I'll be through then—and you can carry the trunks away."

When George was gone he worked on slowly until everything was unpacked and in its proper place. Then he lifted the little gold frame and looked long and tenderly into the eyes of the woman pictured there. Reverently he pressed the beautiful face to his heart and his eyes closed. While shot from a rift in the foamy white clouds of the summer sky a sunbeam fell upon his withered right arm and danced and frolicked there.

CHAPTER XI

I CAN'T make it out, I can't make it out," Mabel was saying to herself as she busied about her own little home after her duties in Dr. Paul's household were over for the day. She was of a logical turn of mind, and had taught in the country school for three years during the time she and George were courting. Now some problem vexed her.

"Let me help you," a deep bass voice whispered in her ear, as George directed her from the rear until she found herself seated upon his knee by the kitchen window. "Now turn about and put your arms around my neck, and tell me what's worrying you?" the voice continued, while his warm breath fanned her cheek.

"Don't be so rough, George," his blushing wife commanded. "Let my hands go. I'll not put my arms around your neck unless I choose—so don't try to force me."

"Well, sit quiet, Mabel, and don't be so nifty. What's the matter? What's bristled you up so?"

"What right has a man to dictate to a woman, anyway?" Mabel turned about and faced him while her dark eyes flashed.

"No right, I reckon," he answered good-humouredly.

"Men have run the country too long, anyway," his indignant wife continued. "There is that poor Mrs. Blair, for instance, she got married—so Mary says Miss James told her—when she was very young and her husband ran everything to ruin, and look at her now—having to earn her own living like this—keeping house for a man who won't let her live like a free woman, but keeps her caged up in a few rooms and a rose-garden. Truly, men exasperate me. I was reading in the paper the other day that women are going to have the vote soon, and I just hope they get it. It's time men were put in their proper place and kept there. Women have just been slaves to them long enough."

"Are you a new woman, Mabel?" her husband enquired in that tone of amused tolerance which always annoyed her.

"Not like Mrs. Brock" (who was a real suffragette), Mabel answered, haughtily, "but I believe that women should vote, and that they should have equal rights with men, and that no man should have a right to ruin a woman's life," so saying she arose from her husband's knee and stood a little distance away, looking in his direction but out of the window.

"Whose been pumping hot-air into your little head?" he asked.

"Nobody," she answered sharply, "but how could a beautiful woman like Mrs. Blair throw herself

away on a drunkard, and how could a man be a drunkard with a wife like that. Do you believe in love, George Lane?" she ended in tones of authority.

His arms went out and drew her down again to his knee, while he took her hands in his big rough ones. "Yes, I do, and so do you. You're my wife, and——"

But Mabel would not listen. "Yes, there it is, possession again. I'm your wife, I belong to you. I'm yours, body and soul. Well, George Lane, that possession business won't go here with me, so there —take that," and she drew her five foot six of sound buxom physique up to its limit of dignity and strode over to the stove, where the kettle, all undismayed by this first quarrel, sang on right merrily.

"I guess it's no wonder the man drank," said George, his temper rising at last. "Dr. Paul's right about a lot. He knows what a woman is and he hasn't much use for them."

"Dr. Paul makes me mad," stormed Mabel in tones that only a free woman in a free country could use. "He's a woman-hater—who could have any respect for a bitter, selfish man like that? He'd be a tyrant to a wife if he ever had one."

"Well, he won't ever have one," George answered her. "And I guess most any man's better without one," he continued, as he picked up his cap and went out slamming the door.

Later on, when he returned, he found Mabel sitting in the big chair by the window. It was twilight

and she sat in the shadow. He hung his cap up on the hook behind the door, and pumped some water into the basin and washed his hands, then he went over to her chair. "Mabel," he said, and his voice was low and trembled.

No answer.

"Mabel," again.

Still no answer, but the chair began to rock easy.

He felt for her hand, and she did not draw it away. "Are you over it?" he asked her.

"Over what?" she answered sharply.

"Over your tout."

"I wasn't in a tout. Are you over your temper?"

"I wasn't in a temper," said George. Then, as he took her in his arms, "You're a woman after my own heart, Mabel—a good-looker with a lot of kick and go—but be easy on the men after this. Remember, your husband's a man."

"George," Mabel straightened up and looked him in the eyes, "answer me, do you think a man's better unmarried?"

"Well, some," said he.

"That's not my question."

"Yes it is; but if you mean—would I be better unmarried, I'll answer that for you if you like."

"Well, do," she said from his shoulder.

"I'd best whisper it in case you might cast it up to me later some time," the big man teased as he held her close. "It's the atmosphere that's making us row so."

"What atmosphere?"

"Up there," pointing his finger to the old "James Home," "and all the talk about women and men. Sure, dear, I will confess I find the Doctor hard to understand sometimes—but he's a great man—of that I'm certain."

"And what Mary told me about Mrs. Blair made me mad at all men, George, and then Dr. Paul is so queer. Oh, of course, I never see him—none of us do—and, what's more, we don't want to—but I watched him from behind the curtains the other day, and somehow I felt sorry for him, just as though I wanted to cry—perhaps he's been jilted, George?"

"It's none of our business if he has," said her husband sternly. "But I am sure of this—she'll never get the chance to do it again."

CHAPTER XII

A WEEK had gone by since Paul had settled at Fernholme, and Virginia, now Mrs. Blair by name, had undertaken the duties of his household.

Paul rose every morning at seven and walked down to the river, some two miles distant, and back before breakfast. He had determined to do this regularly, no matter what the weather might be, and so far the rule had been adhered to.

After breakfast he looked over the mail which George brought from the office at Ferndale, a fifteen minutes' walk from the house, and the rest of the morning he usually spent with George planning improvements about the place, and in a general way becoming conversant with its needs and possibilities.

George had secured the help of a neighbouring farmer's son, and together they kept the place in good condition.

Virginia had not as yet seen Paul, even from behind the curtains as Mabel had done, and at times the free speech of both Mabel and Mary regarding the eccentricities of the owner of the house were both distressing and amusing to her. Reserve and dignity were hers naturally, and to maintain the

prestige of the old home, which she felt responsible to do, at times her full supply of these virtues were necessary. Mabel's harangues of "man-made law" and "woman slavery" and other equally strong topics, all such easy subjects because of the eccentric rules and regulations, were often witty and clever and appealed to her sense of humour, but when the moonlight filled her rose-garden and she wandered alone there, her heart turned back to the sweet memories of those days passed by that filled her thoughts so often now, the humour changed to tragedy and rang false and unkind.

While Paul looked over his mail George carried any instructions which might be necessary for the day from Paul to the "Woman in Charge," as Paul always termed her.

Mabel was cook, and because there were some things not to his liking, much against his will, Paul had found it necessary to send a few orders to Mrs. Blair regarding his tastes and desires in that direction. The cooking was good, but he was persistently served with pie for dinner—quite delicious pie, to be sure—but Paul never ate pie, any kind of pie, and at last George carried a message to the "Woman in Charge" to the effect that "never again was she to allow him to be served with pie," and George added, with a wink, "on penalty of death."

Then this morning he had been served with sausages for breakfast. Paul never ate sausages and he so strongly feared that the offence might be repeated

that he decided to write out a list of what he would, and would not eat, and send it to the kitchen. After doing this and instructing George to deliver it, he settled himself to open the morning mail.

One letter in particular held his attention. He read and re-read it several times, then he paced up and down the length of the room. "What keeps him? what keeps him?" he spoke irritably to himself. "Here I am caged, in a house full of women. Can't even enter the hall to call him, lest I meet some petticoat. Confound them!"

Then he paced up and down again, while he waited in all his newly acquired impatience for George to return, and as he paced he kept exclaiming over and over again, "What audacity! What impertinence! What astounding impertinence! I should say not! What did I come here for—to keep a boarding-house?"

Then George came. "Mrs. Blair says," he began.

But Paul had no ear for him. "Confound Mrs. Blair and all the household of petticoats!" his wrath exploded. "What's kept you so long, man. I tell you, women are the curse of the world, and mine in particular. I want you to post a letter for me. When does the mail go?"

"Not till to-night at seven," George answered.

"Well, I'll write it now," said Paul very much excited.

George turned to leave the room.

"Here, man, wait," Paul stormed at him. "What

do you think I wanted you for?" Then laying the open letter before him, he looked up and said irritably, "Sit down, George; sit down."

"What's the trouble, sir?" George asked.

"Trouble!" stormed Paul. "This letter might mean trouble, but it will not with me. I am going to write a letter to her that will settle her impertinence forever. The idea of asking if I could have the boy here. Perfect nonsense! I didn't come here to run a health resort for my relations!"

"A boy, is it?" asked George, manifesting only a slight amount of the curiosity he felt.

"Yes, here," said Paul, handing him the letter, "read it."

George began to read.

"Don't read it," said Paul hotly, "hand it to me. Don't you dare to read it." Then, suddenly remembering himself, he stammered confused and ashamed. "Pardon me, George, but there is something very private in that letter." Recovering his composure he went on, "It's this way, George. A cousin of my father's writes to ask me—now listen to this—to invite her boy Robin here for the summer. What do you think of that, man?" Paul threw the letter down and laughed. "Not only asks me to have him, but requests me to invite him to come. That's a fair sample of James cheek. I've seen the James pride; I know it all right—now here's the James cheek—rank impudence, I call it—noth-

ing but that," he ended abruptly and looked out of the window. For the moment the harshness seemed to have left his face, or was it only the morning sunlight as it cast its radiance there?

"Rather nice," said George, "to have the lad here. He'd be company for you."

"Company!" Paul stormed again. "Why, man, what do I want with company? Didn't I come out here to get away from it? I came here for a purpose and nothing is going to turn me from the accomplishment of that purpose—neither man nor devil—and I tell you, George, I will not have this boy here—I will not. This woman whom I have not seen for years—and, by the way, relations seldom write to you unless they have some favour to ask—has the impudence to ask me to invite her boy Robin for the summer. Why, I only remember the lad when he was just a little fellow, and now in the fall he goes up for his finals in medicine. No—I will not have him—so there's an end to it."

"Very well," said George, anxious to bring this one-sided discussion to a close, "I will go, and when you are ready, sir——"

"Yes, I'll join you in a moment," Paul agreed, seating himself at his desk. "As soon as I settle this thing."

Then he wrote a note to his father's cousin, Barbara James, stating clearly and briefly that it was quite out of the question for him to comply with her

request, that he already had more people about than he wished for, and that entertaining was for him absolutely out of the question. He refrained from adding any little pleasant comment about anything or anybody, enquired after no one's health, not even her own, and closed the note abruptly.

That afternoon George enquired if the letter was ready for mailing, and to his surprise Paul answered that he had decided to sleep over it and write the following day.

That night as he sat in the library, the latest book on surgery open before him, the face of Robin James came repeatedly into his vision as he remembered him, a bright, wide-awake lad, curious about everything relating to medicine and surgery, asking all sorts of questions. A clever boy and one he had taken to greatly. A young man now he was, full of life and youth, and eager for the experience of living, and learning, and doing, asking that he take an interest in him, that he might receive inspiration from him. The mockery of it—that he should be asked to inspire any one. Everything that mattered had gone from his life—he had only come out here to fight the last great enemy, that he should escape a destiny worse than death. But he had vowed that one thing should not depart from him, that was his profession and his love for it. Nothing could take that away. In mind and heart, even though life had deprived him of action, he was still Dr. Paul James, surgeon, and so he would remain.

Then as he sat there, huddled up in the big arm-chair that had been his great-grandfather's, into his vision crept another picture. A picture of a young man, full of the love of work and endeavour, eager for service, with two hands that were surgeon's hands, skilful and sensitive—another Dr. James. Perhaps he could inspire this life with the hopes which had so lately been his own. Perhaps he could help the lad's hands to do what his own could never again do. He could take the lad's hands and make them his, and, thinking this, with his left hand he followed the line of his right arm, down to the useless fingers, so helpless there, while over his features a shadow of extreme pain passed, leaving him pale. He sat that way for a long time, and when he opened his eyes they were full of pain.

He got up and walked over to the desk and, taking the letter he had written that morning, he quickly tore it in two and dropped it in the waste-paper basket. Then he wrote another letter, and it ran thus:

My dear Barbara:

Your letter of the 20th received this morning. I remember Robin quite well, and will write to-morrow, asking him to come and spend the summer here. You are entirely mistaken about the other matter. I have no intention of marrying.

Sincerely yours,

Paul James.

The letter he had received read:

DEAR COUSIN PAUL:

I am sure that you will pardon me for my long silence. Since Christmas I have thought many times of writing to thank you for your usual kind wishes which never fail to reach me as each year passes on. But time and tide wait for no one, and so this hurrying life has filled my days, and some things have been neglected, I fear.

We were all so delighted to hear that you have opened up Fernholme. How I used to love it, when as a child your grandmother delighted my heart with an invitation to visit her. A vision of the beautiful old place as I loved it then and have loved it since comes before my eyes, and I do envy you the summer there. Of course, we were all very sorry to hear of your trouble. It must mean a fearful loss to you and we are still clinging to the hope that your arm may yet regain its life and usefulness. Robin goes up for his Finals this winter. You remember him, although I think he was but a boy when you saw him last. He remembers you and always cherishes you in deep regard—in fact, you are his idol. He reads all he can get about you and your achievements and quotes you continually. Now, I am going to ask a favour of you. Would you ask him to spend the summer with you? To be there learning of you, sitting at your feet, so to speak, and also in the old home, the place that is regarded as almost sacred by the whole James family would be a rare privilege for him. Of course, you would have to ask him as he does not know I am writing, and besides the invitation would not do to come through me. I know you will understand my desires for him. It would

be a wonderful experience for him to have the summer with you, and I am ambitious for him and would like him to have every advantage.

Before I close, I do wish to congratulate you on some news Arabella gave me in her Christmas letter, and which I am very glad to hear,—that you are to be married soon. I wish you every happiness. It must be a great source of comfort to you now. There is nothing like love to even things up, is there Paul?

Again trusting that you will understand my request, and with all my best wishes for now and the future,

Believe me,

Your loving cousin,

BARBARA.

CHAPTER XIII

VIRGINIA was wholly responsible for the management of the house, and found George an almost indispensable help. He was always ready and willing to serve, and proved more than capable in anything he undertook. Both he and his wife had recognised that Virginia was no ordinary housekeeper, and amongst the many puzzles and surprises of this strange household her presence, her past, the little they knew of it, and her attractive and beautiful personality, caused them much wonder and surmise. Her characteristic reserve saved her from much questioning curiosity, for although Mabel desired greatly to know more about Mrs. Blair's romantic history, she could not feel sufficiently intimate to enquire, or to display the curiosity regarding her that so often sorely tempted her.

George, bound by a feeling of fine loyalty to Dr. Paul, though often in much doubt himself and many times puzzled and annoyed by Paul's rules and strange utterances which often seemed so hard to understand, refrained from displaying his bewilderment before Mabel, and considered it his duty to keep it to himself, and at the same time pour cold water on any display of curiosity on her part.

A day that Mabel did not feel imbued with a strong sense of humour she easily became depressed and consequently bad-tempered, while George often felt the same order of procedure going on within himself.

After the letter was posted, Paul seemed in a very restless mood, and when George came in he handed him a list of things he wished him to attend to while in town that day.

"George," he began, in that restless, impatient way so characteristic of him now, "I want all those things attended to to-day. You understand, do you not, that my orders are to receive your first attention?"

"Yes, I finish your list before I ever look at Mrs. Blair's," agreed George good-naturedly.

"Mrs. Blair," repeated Paul, "by her you mean, the 'Woman in Charge'? She might be Mrs. Jones or Mrs. Brown for all I know. To me she is just a woman, and I wish there were no women here." Then he broke out suddenly, "Can you tell me, man, what I will do with him when he comes?"

"With whom?" George asked.

"Why, man, this Robin James, my guest—for the summer. This young man—son of my father's cousin whom I never hear from, except when I can be of use to her. Huh! A long time she has been in thanking me for my Christmas wishes. Relatives are a man's worst enemies. You can't get away from them. You were born with them. They

hound you all your life, and follow you to the grave. No escape from them; and some people believe in family reunions above. Even death is no guarantee that your relatives will not still be around you when you open your eyes in the other world. Cousins, aunts,—distant cousins—the distant means nothing, the further removed, the nearer they come. Why the astounding audacity and nerve of this woman far surpasses anything my own sister, if I had one, could have been guilty of. That's the question, George, what will I do with him?"

Naturally this was all a surprise to George. He had concluded that the question was settled in the negative, and had given it no more thought. "Why, sir," he ventured, in an effort to pour oil on troubled waters, "it appears to me that he'll cheer the place up wonderful."

"Cheer the place up," Paul broke forth in fresh disgust. "He'll be a perfect nuisance, and you know it. This household wasn't arranged to include visitors. I'll allow no change in the usual order of things. He will remain in my part of the house, the room next to mine can be prepared for him, and he will not be allowed in any way to interfere with things. He will have to conform to the rules of the house in everything. God knows what sort of a mess this chap will make for us."

"Things will work out all right after he gets here," comforted George, secretly not at all adverse to his coming.

"When he gets here. That's just it," agreed Paul harshly. "My days and my nights will be disturbed with the thought of it till he gets here, and after that there will be no peace or rest. There are two kinds of fools in the world, George, the soft-hearted, and the hard-hearted. I'm the first-mentioned, soft as putty—easy, the 'you beckon and I run' kind. Well, I'm mending my ways. This spineless act of mine is just about the last remnant of that putty part of me. If this young fellow thinks he's coming here to fool about enjoying himself to every one else's distress and mine in particular he's going to suffer the greatest disappointment of his life. I warrant that this summer's vacation will be the best remembered of his existence, before I get through with him."

"When does he come?" asked George, apparently undisturbed by these scathing sentiments.

"Most likely as soon as he can after he gets my invitation. Eager to come—and if I can manage it—eager to go. We'll see what sort of stuff this young James is made of."

Paul's wrath had subsided, and to George there seemed to lurk about his expression a sinister sneer which was not pleasant, yet as he watched a peculiar twinkle stole into the eyes of Dr. Paul which was hard to reconcile with the hard lines about his mouth and the sentiments he had just expressed.

"By the way," Paul scowled as he bent over the morning paper, "if I ever include on my list of wants an order for wine and liquor, you have it filled

at your peril, George. Do you understand me thoroughly?"

There was a threat in the tone which drove the truth home to George in a very vivid way.

Paul looked up and their eyes met.

"Yes, I understand," George answered, in a voice which said that he was just beginning to see beneath the surface of things.

"And," continued Paul, as he turned the page of the paper, "remember, George, that this is the 25th of the month."

"Yes," said George lamely.

On his way to town he took the list from his pocket that Paul had given him and looked at it. The last item was an order for wine and liquor. "I'm blessed if I see the logic in it," he said to himself; "I'm sure this is the 25th of the month, but what did he mean by that?"

CHAPTER XIV

PAUL'S nerves were not to be tampered with during the time intervening between the day when Robin's letter had come stating that "he would be jolly pleased to accept Paul's invitation for the summer," and the day of his expected arrival.

George was to drive into the city and meet him there, as the through express did not stop at the little station at Ferndale.

Among Paul's recent purchases for the stable were two riding horses. One was his choice for the saddle and the other, though a splendid saddle horse, was to be used more for driving purposes. He did not introduce riding each morning in place of walking, for he still wished to adhere to his walk to the river and back before breakfast, it was a much needed tonic for the day; but after a strenuous afternoon's work in the laboratory he found a ride in the twilight stillness quieting to the riot of emotions within him, and before the night closed in with its blessed unconsciousness he had the assurance that another day's fight was over, and that if the enemy had not been put to rout completely, he had at least been held at bay and could boast of no added territory.

The room next to Paul's had been prepared for

the guest, though Paul would much have preferred to have had him across the hall, but his fear that some embarrassing situation might arise out of the occupation of a room looking on to the east, because of the women's quarters to the rear, forced him to comply to the necessary demands of the hour.

On the morning of Robin's expected arrival Paul arranged that he would ride away into the blue of the distant hills, arriving back just in time to receive his guest. Perhaps in this way he could collect his thoughts and view in the proper perspective this fool undertaking of his, and decide just how the young fellow was to be initiated into the rules of the household, and plan a little in regard to what method of procedure he should adopt as to the summer's programme of work for this student of his.

George had left early, because of some business to be attended to prior to meeting the train, so that when a telegram arrived at the house no one was there to open it. Virginia ordered it to be placed on the table in the library, awaiting the master's return.

As Paul drew rein at the gate he met George returning disconsolate and alone.

"Where's your passenger?" Paul enquired sharply.

"He didn't come."

"Didn't come?" stormed Paul. "Why, man, you've failed to recognise each other, that's all, and he's likely waiting there for you. Did you follow my instructions?"

"To the letter," said George, somewhat nettled, "I stood directly in front of the news-stand to the right, sir, and no one approached me. He didn't come."

"No, not with you, that's certain," Paul commented, as he turned in at the gate, "however, if he's any pluck, he'll find his way, and if he hasn't we're better off without him."

When he entered the house and read the telegram—

> Sorry unavoidably delayed. Expect me week from to-day.
>
> R. J.

he flew into a rage because another week of waiting lay before him, another week of irritation. He was rebellious at the young man's coming and annoyed because of his weakness in succumbing so easily to the request of this distant relative, and irritated beyond measure because his summer's programme was to be broken into. "All this upset for nothing," he stormed, to the picture of his grandfather looking down upon him. "Selfish, inconsiderate young upstart. Thinks we've nothing to do but meet trains. We'll teach him a few things worth knowing. Fool that I was to countenance such a thing. Never again will I consent to such a proposal from any one, no matter if she be cousin—or aunt—or grand-aunt."

One morning a few days after the making of this resolution Arabella arrived, just to view for herself

the manner of this strange household, and to reassure herself in the conviction she had held to from the beginning that the place would go to ruin and wrack under such eccentric management.

As her car turned in at the gate Paul spied her from his desk at the library window. He had just finished reading a letter received in that morning's mail, which did not improve his temper. In fact his feelings were simply unutterable, and his exclamation of surprise as he caught sight of Arabella was anything but complimentary.

She descended from the car with that quiet dignity that denoted the James pride at its height, and as George opened the door she greeted him with: "I am glad to perceive that you are still alive, George. Is Dr. James in?"

"He is, Madam," said George, catching a bit of the bristling haughtiness. "Step right in."

Paul looked up from the open letter before him with a scowl and advanced to greet Arabella.

"You are looking worse than I thought, Paul," she said, with a candidness somewhat unpleasant. "I told you this scheme of yours would result in no good either to you or the place. I told you that what you needed was a tonic—but no, you would not believe me, and now this is the result. I suppose the place has suffered equally."

"Will you sit down, Aunt?" Paul spoke sharply, "or would you prefer to begin a trip of inspection?

George will show you around the ruins if it is your will."

"I see that you are in anything but a pleasant frame of mind," Arabella answered him, "you are still devoid of manners, Paul, and your curiosity bears the new stamp upon it. Thank you, I will go about the place without your body guard."

"No, Aunt," said Paul, "you will not. George will show you around if you care to go, but you cannot go alone."

At this Arabella sat down and stared at Paul with eyes that said plainly, "You are crazy. Your head is gone."

"Paul, you do not know what you are saying," she said in amazement.

"I know quite well what I am saying. By the way, Aunt, what is your mission to this desolate place?"

"What is my mission here?" she repeated, shocked at his impudence. "Have I not a right to come when I will? Have I to explain before entering this desolate place, as you term it, and as you have made it, my reasons to you for journeying here? Truly this last insult surpasses anything preceding it." Arabella rose to her feet and began pacing up and down the room, her silk skirts swishing about in her fury.

"Quiet yourself, Aunt," observed Paul, picking up the open letter, "you should have delayed your visit a little longer, then it would have been your pleasure to talk with a gentleman of manners and courtesy, a guest of mine whom I am expecting soon." There

was a tantalising glint about his eyes, which made his expression very provoking to Arabella.

"Do you mean to tell me," she began, "that you are to have a guest here, under this rule of yours, where every one has to stay in their own rooms—no one sees the other—day in or day out? In this atmosphere of hate—you hate all women—and your housekeeper hates all men. In this place that is going to wrack and ruin under your absurd rules and regulations. Paul James, this is the most unfortunate day of my life."

"I can say ditto to that, Aunt," Paul commented, still with that tantalising glint showing, "and it might have all been avoided if you had only not come. Simple, isn't it? However, now that you are here, paying me such a pleasant little visit, wouldn't you like to know more about this guest of mine?"

"Who is he?" Arabella asked sharply.

"Now that's to the point," answered Paul, "but by the way, Aunt, it would surprise you to know the name of the writer of this letter I am holding in my hand."

"I have no curiosity."

"No, you never had. It's not a James characteristic," he laughed, "still, why did you come? But we'll let that go, and return to the letter in hand. Read it, Aunt," and he held it out to her.

She took it from him, but she took it proudly—with her chin up and her taffeta skirts lying stiffly around her.

"She's an old friend of yours," he said, as she began to read,—

My dear Paul:

I have wondered why you did not answer that last letter of mine and perhaps misjudged you, thinking —no not quite that—dreaming that you had perhaps changed toward me as the others did so long ago, until I heard by mere accident that you had been ill. I cannot tell you just how sorry I feel about it. I understand so well just what it must mean to you and optimism seems out of place and insincere. I know that it will be a great trial for you to bear, but I know also that you will come out of it victorious. With the spirit of your wonderful mother alive in your breast you will come out victor in any fight you have to enter. It seems rather out of place to relate my troubles when you have so many of your own, but when I heard that you were at that dear old place where as a child I spent the happiest days of my life, I felt that perhaps you would understand why I intrude upon your rest there. I do not mean to trespass, and I want you to be perfectly candid with me. Betty has been miserable since her graduation. I think the nervous strain of the last year has been too much for her, and I am at a loss to know how to bring the roses back to her cheeks and the smiles to her lips. You know that she is all that I have, and my heart is bound up in her. She has never seen Fernholme and since childhood I have told her stories of the love and tenderness with which your mother filled my life as I romped and roamed about the dear old place which with the years grows dearer in memory, and I wondered if you would mind having her there for a while. I know that she would be no

trouble. She looks something like your dear mother did at her age, that is if the pictures I have of her are true. She would love to see the place, and to love it not in story only but for itself. It is a dream I have always cherished that some day she, too, would spend happy days there. Now, Paul, if I have been rude in asking this, please let me know, for I prize your friendship more than I can put into words. You are the only link left, binding me to the past. All the others have snapped and fallen away, so I would not for words offend you. Please answer me candidly and accept my best wishes for all that concerns you, and believe me to be,

Yours very sincerely,

ALICE.

"Alice who?" demanded Arabella as she finished.

"Alice Wilson," snapped Paul through his teeth.

"As I thought," said his Aunt, her pride rising afresh, "you have always displayed a liking for this woman. Though she is a cousin of your mother's, long ago she severed her connection with this family by her unspeakable conduct. Do you know, sir, that by her action she dishonoured the name she bore, and brought the pride of your mother's family to shame. She made it a laughing stock, and you keep friendship with such a woman; one who flung to the winds her good name for a worthless good-for-nothing who had not money enough to pay the minister who married them—a man without reputation or family, or means—a ne'er-do-well. I remember the circumstances,—we all opposed it—we tried to argue and

reason with her, but she would not listen, and the shameless hussy ran away with him. It was not decent, Paul James," and Arabella's eyes flashed fire. "This speaks for itself. That this woman should be intimate enough with you to request such a thing! If you allow this girl to come here you will deny for yourself the right to boast the name of James, and dishonour the mother who bore you."

Paul had been restlessly drumming his fingers on the arm of his chair during this fearful onslaught, and when it came to an end his face was white and his jaw set.

"Aunt," his words stung, "the brand of pride that you carry about with you is a swindle. It's rubbish. I thank God that I do not know it. It is not the James brand. It's your brand and the brand of those like you who have treated this woman so shamefully. The James pride is a nobler thing. It is a thing of honour, of truth, of worth, and of all those qualities which go to make human beings human and decent and just. Aunt, your pride is a laughing stock. It——"

"I will not listen," Arabella interrupted with heat. "To have that girl here, to think of her in this house —you are mad if you allow such a thing—and if you do——"

"Yes," Paul broke in, his temper ablaze, "if I have her here, Aunt, this child of the despised Alice —and if she lives in this house—if she roams over these grounds, plays my mother's piano, picks my

roses, rides my horse—if she lives and thrives and blooms here, Aunt, what then? What will you and your counterfeit pride do then, Aunt Arabella?" His lips were drawn into a sneer and his words came as a threat to her.

"I will never speak to you again, Dr. Paul James," and to Arabella this sentence was the worst condemnation she could utter.

Paul drew his chair close to his desk and took his pen in hand. He spoke, still with that sneer, "I would have written Alice differently had you not appeared on the scene just when you did. If Fate sent you here she will be satisfied, for the girl comes. I will write to her mother to that effect now, and while you sit there and fume George will take it to the post so it will be sure to go now—and furthermore—you can write and tell all the others, who have acted towards this woman as you have done, the news. Tell them what I have said, and that I do this because I wish to make amends for all your and their acts of shame—their cruel slurs—their stinging injustices to this woman, the girl's mother. I am on her side because she married the man she loved—she trusted him and played fair. I don't believe in love, but she did, and lived up to her belief, and he measured up too. You forget that—a man always does, when he's put up to it—when a woman has trust and faith in him. Yes, Aunt," he continued as he wrote hurriedly, "she's coming."

"Let me go," Arabella broke in as she went towards the door.

"Sit down," Paul ordered in tones that made one quiver, "sit down till I finish."

"I will not," said Arabella.

"Well, stand then," said Paul.

"It is done," as he folded the letter and addressed it. Then he called George who happened to be within sound. "Take this to the office at once," he directed.

"Now," as George closed the door, "you may go, Aunt."

He sat down by the desk and the glint had all gone from his eyes.

"Yes, I will go, Paul James, and I will not return."

"Thank God," Paul breathed.

Then she continued as she drew her height up proudly, "Your weakness will be the undoing of you, as your father's weakness was his undoing."

A wicked expression came into Paul's face as he looked up. "By the way," he said, "before you lock the house for the summer—that case of wine—the one we have often quarrelled about—that was my father's, his undoing, you know—give it to George. He will call for it to-morrow. My weakness and my father's weakness might just as well be out here together."

Arabella turned and looked at him with such disdain and contempt he might well wither under it.

"Paul James," she said, "you are your father's son, and his end will be yours."

"Not if I know it—no, Aunt—not if I know it," he called after her, but she did not hear him, nor the harsh laugh that followed.

CHAPTER XV

HOW I wish," Paul said to himself when the magnitude of his folly bore full upon him and the sound of Arabella's motor faded into the distance, "that I had that letter in my hands just now, to tear it into bits. I am a fool—yes, nothing but a fool. To have sweet revenge upon Aunt Arabella I plunge into a barbed-wire fence. Now fool," addressing himself in tones that would not be tolerated by another, "what will you do with her—this Betty—this new petticoat visitor. If Aunt Arabella had only stayed at home to-day this would not have happened. Aunt Arabella—Aunt Arabella —you are the joy of my life." This irony seemed to amuse him and he laughed, "But, Aunt, I have the joke on you yet, and the thing's worth it if for nothing else. If you had only known, dear Aunt, that my guest of whom I spoke is none other than Barbara's son, who, not if she knew it, would allow her son to breathe the same air with a daughter of the despised Alice. True, oh fool, I have opened a house of intrigue." But his mood changed quickly. "I will not have it." His lips tightened into that set expression so characteristic of him. "Am I going to heap folly upon folly. These young people shall

mind their own affairs exclusively. This girl I shall give into the tender care and keeping of my man-hating Woman in Charge and the young man shall be my care. There will be no nonsense—of that I am certain. I shall not allow my object in coming here to be frustrated by these young upstarts." But as his mind grasped the full meaning of the situation, it became overwhelming. "What a mess I am in," he exclaimed, as he paced up and down, "merciful heavens, what a mess I am in!"

The next day George was very much puzzled about the last order of Paul's, namely, to call at the town house for a case of wine Arabella would give him. He remembered the eccentric instructions of the 25th, "you have it filled at your peril, George," those words kept ringing through his mind and greatly perplexed him. "Could this be called an order for wine or liquor?" he asked himself, and it seemed to him that it could. Then, "Would he call for it or would he not? and if he did call for it what would he do with it? could he bring it to the house?" He could get no light on this vexing problem, so in sheer desperation he appealed to Mabel, and as he had been keeping things pretty much to himself of late, he had to go back and tell her the whole affair.

At first Mabel's temper was aroused. "He's lost his reason, George," she said, "no man in his senses would talk like that. He's a tyrant too, and his conduct since coming here is the best proof that I

want to make me believe that the tyrant lies dormant in every man waiting for the proper pressure to bring it to the surface."

"You're getting mixed, Mabel," George interrupted, "pressure generally pushes a thing down."

"Pressure from beneath," said Mabel; "you never were real clever—and it wouldn't be out of the way for you to remember that before I married you I had some brains."

"Yes, marriage is sure an awful trying agreement on the woman. You've no brains now, I suppose, Mabel."

"Well, according to the law," Mabel informed him, "a woman becomes an idiot after she marries—or at least is classed with them—only women, idiots, and Indians have no vote."

"Yes, I have heard you quote that before. That's old, but things aren't very harmonious between us lately and I am thinking of bringing a little music into the house. I am going to buy a gramophone."

"Can we afford it?"

"That's a woman for you," said he; "why can't you just enter into the joy of it and leave the rest to me?"

"You seem to forget that I did some figuring before I met you, but manlike you have the confidence of your sex," commented his wife, still irritable.

"Damn this atmosphere," muttered George to himself. "We were happy before." Then he

turned to Mabel, "Well, you've helped me a lot. A wife's sure a great help to her husband."

"I've been thinking," said she, "and a woman doesn't need to stop talking to think."

"No," he chimed in, "a woman seems to be able to do most anything, and talk too."

"I've been thinking," went on Mabel, paying no heed to this last remark, "and what I would say is this. Call for the wine—that is your order. He wants to drink, and knows he shouldn't, so depends upon you to keep him from it."

"I don't agree with you," said George sharply, "but go on. What will I do with the case when I get it?"

"Bring it here," said Mabel suddenly inspired, "and put it in our cellar, and if he asks you for it, you can give it to him."

"That's the best thing you've said yet, and I'll do it, but mark me," and the dormant tyrant arose, "don't you mention a word of this that I have told you. See what good a woman can be at keeping a secret," he called back to her with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

As Paul alighted from his ride that night and flung the reins to George, he stood there for a moment silent, and the man drew back a little in surprise as he looked into Paul's haggard face, bearing so clearly the marks of inner conflict. A great wave of pity surged through him.

"Where is it?" Paul asked in a choked voice.

"I put it in the cellar of my house," George answered slowly.

Paul glanced up—was it in surprise? And George could not meet the look of pain in his eyes; then with his left hand he slowly stroked the proudly curved neck of his horse as though a new sympathy existed between them while his voice sank low. "Just keep it there, George, and—thank you."

CHAPTER XVI

ON the evening of the day preceding Robin's expected arrival he rang Paul's front door bell and stood there, his eyes bright with expectancy, and his well-bronzed open countenance beaming with smiles.

George let him in, attempting to hide his surprise, as he stated in answer to Robin's enquiry that "Dr. James was out riding and would not be in for some time," adding "Would he take a chair and wait?"

"Thanks," said Robin, "I'll wait."

Whereupon George proceeded to leave the room.

"By the way," began the stranger, "do you happen to be the George who was to meet me?"

"That depends upon who you are," George answered craftily.

"That's all right," the young man replied, somewhat embarrassed, "you see, I found I could come a day earlier, and thought I'd chance it. I felt badly about giving you the trouble of meeting me again. I guess I'm dusty though. You see they told me it was just five miles, and that's nothing to me—but—well," and he laughed, "I guess I never knew the right measurement of a mile before."

George opened his mouth in surprise. "Did you walk all the way?"

"Yes, almost," the young man laughed, "except for a lift of about a mile or so—only it didn't seem like a mile—that is, if the others were only miles."

"The distance," said George, taking the situation seriously, "is between twelve and thirteen miles."

"Fine!" exclaimed Robin, "that's better, then I didn't do so badly after all. That's what I couldn't make out—how it took me so long to walk five miles. I say," he added, "could I shake the dust off? I'd look a lot more presentable I imagine."

George became greatly embarrassed. He had received no instructions as to how to proceed under such circumstances, and a great fear began to take hold of him. "The chap must be dog-tired," he said to himself, "and perhaps Dr. Paul would not think to give him his dinner, he couldn't possibly have had it, and the hour was now seven-thirty. Dr. Paul might not be back for an hour yet."

He was in a blue study, and hurried, much to Robin's surprise, left the room without replying. He went to explain the situation to Virginia. "There are no rules about it," he finished lamely, "and I'm not easy at taking things over into my own hands."

"Show him to his room, George," Virginia told him, "and I will see that Mary gets something for him to eat. Dr. James would wish it, I know."

George wasn't so sure about that.

"You had better remain and serve it, so that no

rule of the house will be broken to cause the Doctor annoyance," she continued.

All this agreed with George's idea, though he felt very dubious as to just whether it should be done or not.

"Does he seem very tired?" Virginia enquired, hoping to get some idea of the young fellow from George.

"Not what you'd notice," he replied; "he's six feet in his boots if he's a foot, and I take it he's the right sort. Spoke up just as though he'd known me all my life. It's my idea that he'll make some difference in things about here, that is," he added thoughtfully, "if he'll stay."

Virginia smiled. "I think he will," she answered as he left her feeling much relieved.

Robin was not in the library when he returned. George was bewildered.

"Here I am," called a voice from the rear of the hall, "I spied this picture of the old Judge. Wonderfully good, I imagine."

"There will be trouble, this young man inclines to wander," said George to himself, as he led Robin upstairs to his room. He noticed that the announcement that "dinner would be ready soon" seemed to please him more than enough.

"This is jolly kind of you," Robin said, as a little later he sat in the spacious dining-room finished in rich old mahogany, and the walls hung with rare old paintings. "Jolly kind of you," he repeated. "I

certainly will make a better impression, that's certain, isn't it?"

George had lost his tongue. He felt sure that the young man would ask questions, and he knew not how to answer them. In loyalty to Dr. Paul he determined to tell nothing. When he returned with hot soup from the kitchen he felt decidedly nervous.

"I'm sure I'm a right-down nuisance," began the young man, "I suppose the cook's out, and say," with concern, "you didn't have to do all this yourself, did you?"

"The cook's out," lied George with more determination than the occasion called for, though literally Mabel was the cook, and she had gone home. "I'm middlin' handy," as he placed the soup before Robin, nearly letting the plate fall in his excitement, then to clinch the thing well he added, "you see the girls like to go for walks around the grounds in the evenings. The nights are grand," with attempted enthusiasm. How many more lies he would have had to tell is uncertain, had not just then the approach of hoofs been heard, and in a moment he was off like a flash leaving Robin much puzzled.

Paul was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind. The expected event of the morrow had given him no contemplative pleasure. The thing had been hanging fire for so long that the thought of Robin's visit seemed as irritation added to irritation. He made no remark to George in dismounting, and while George was torn between conflicting emotions, as to

just what he should and should not say, Paul approached the house innocent of the guest within. "The dining-room ajar—and the lights on—what was up?" Just then a big hearty laugh greeted him, and before he knew it, his hand was grasped by that of a young giant.

"I guess I stole a march on you, Doctor," said the big laughing voice, "thought I'd save your man the bother of meeting me, and since I've been a kid I've always liked surprising people, and I say," beaming upon Paul and still shaking his hand, "it's jolly good of you to have me, and I'm blessed if I'm not jolly glad to be here."

"Yes, yes," answered Paul, withdrawing his hand, and surveying the young man from head to foot, "this is a great surprise and an occasion for rejoicing to be sure." At the same time he noticed that the young man's soup-plate was empty.

"You see," began Robin again, "I found I could get off a day earlier and knew it would be all the same to you."

"Sure," agreed Paul, still standing while Robin continued to stand also. "All the same, all the same, except a few hours' rest between—and what's that?"

"Your man was kindness itself," Robin was a little nervous now. "I'm afraid I've given him a heap of trouble. You see," he explained, looking at Paul critically, "I never thought of eating before I left town, and one gets so dogged hungry, you know walking. I say it is a long tramp, isn't it?"

"Not if one is in condition," remarked Paul. He was listening for George, but that worthy did not appear—for many reasons he had thought it best to go home, and forgot entirely that he had only helped the young man to soup.

"Your man George," Robin made a fresh start, "is quite a treasure. He said that the cook was out walking, and when I came downstairs had this hot soup ready for me. I tell you it was refreshing."

"You've been upstairs?" Paul lifted enquiring eyes to his guest.

"Yes," stammered Robin, finding it hard to be natural under that gaze, and feeling somewhat like a criminal. "You see I wanted a wash, but I say, Doctor," in a last supreme effort, "this is a jolly fine old place, isn't it? Such a corking fine bedroom —and what a view from the window. It's going to be great to spend the summer here with you."

"It is, is it?" said Paul, then, "Did George say just where the cook was walking?"

"Why, no," Robin replied greatly embarrassed, "I think he said the girls liked to roam around the fields in the evening. I noticed as I came in how beautiful everything is."

"Yes, yes," agreed Paul, "I've no doubt you did —but you might ask George the next time you see him to tell you just where the girls walk in the evening, and now—if you're finished," looking deliberately at the empty soup-plate, "we'll go into the library."

"Sure," said Robin, pushing in his chair, "Mother has so often described that room to me, I seem almost to know it," and as they moved away, "what a jolly fine painting of the Judge down there," motioning in the direction of the rear end of the hall.

"You've been down there?" asked Paul, turning to give Robin another glance.

"Why, yes—I noticed it and——"

"Just so, just so," murmured his host as they went into the library, "just as I expected—only worse. You smoke?" noticing that Robin held a cigar in his hand.

"Why, yes, don't you, Doctor?"

"I don't approve of it," and Paul seated himself in the huge armchair of his great-grandfather's, and opened a magazine.

Robin looked at the cigar a second, then at Paul, and slowly put it back in his vest pocket. "I say," he began—then stopped abruptly, for Paul did not look up. He seemed engrossed in his paper, and Robin forgot what he was going to say.

"By the way," he began again, after a few moments of embarrassing silence, "what a jolly——"

"Yes, isn't it?" interrupted Paul, still without looking up.

Just then the cuckoo clock behind him cuckooed the hour of nine. It started Robin and he turned quickly. "Well, I say," he began.

"Yes, no doubt," supplemented Paul, as when Robin's head was turned he glanced up with a strange

look in his eyes, but quickly lowered them again as the young man turned about. "I retire early," he said sharply. "We breakfast at nine. In the morning you will be given a list of the rules of this house. You will find them interesting."

"Yes," agreed Robin, thinking that his host was at last becoming communicative.

"They are not to be broken," Paul continued.

"Yes," again agreed his guest.

"You know the way to your room?" Paul asked, without looking up.

"Say, Doctor," began Robin as he nervously twisted the door-knob, "I hope I'm not a darn nuisance——"

"The switch," went on Paul in the same sharp voice, "is on the right side of the door as you enter, and the bathroom is across the hall. I hope you sleep well. Good night."

"Good night," answered the young man, hardly knowing his own voice, and feeling more like a stranger in a strange land than he had ever felt before in his life.

He lay awake long into the night, every little while experiencing hot waves surging through him of resentment and embarrassment, and besides—he was hungry.

Downstairs Paul's light burned till midnight. Twice he went to the little cupboard in the wall where he kept a small supply of biscuits and cheese in case of emergency, and contemplated doing some-

thing—but whatever he thought of went undone—for he finally locked the little cupboard door again. "Confound George," he muttered to himself, "why in blazes didn't he come back?"

And George wakened up in the middle of the night with a weight upon his conscience that was unbearable. "I clean forgot, I clean forgot," he whispered into space as he turned restlessly.

"What did you forget?" asked his wife, her wits suddenly alert.

"I'm having a nightmare," he answered, "go to sleep, and don't mind me."

"A great nightmare, that," she commented critically, "you've forgotten something. There's a man for you."

And he deemed it best not to answer.

CHAPTER XVII

AWAKENING after a restless night with the warm sun shining full upon his bed, Robin felt that he never understood before just how cheerful a sunbeam could be. The preceding evening and the weary night all seemed as a bad dream. It just couldn't have been true. It must have been a mistake.

The sunbeam was a benediction—a promise of better things. He decided to dress and have a look around the place before breakfast, and besides he was deucedly hungry. "By Jove, starvation must be a ghastly way to die," he confided to his shoes as he laced them up, adding tragically, "my kingdom for a crust. Besides I see myself walking back to that station for my luggage to-day. I'll be blessed if I'll wait for George to bring it, if he continues to show as dilatory tendencies as he manifested in the serving of my dinner last night. Eleven hours and a half between courses. Can you beat it? Knocks the Manhattan all hollow. Well, here goes," and he opened the door and courageously entered the hall.

Not a sound was to be heard anywhere. He walked boldly down to the front door. It was locked,

and the key nowhere to be seen. He opened the door of the dining-room. Perhaps he could get out the way George had come in with the soup. There must be a back or side entrance somewhere. On entering what proved to be a pantry, he saw a girl mixing something.

"Oh, I say," he began, beaming at her, but she had dropped the dish in a flash and was gone. "Now if that wouldn't," he began again, when he felt himself getting suddenly hot—surely his clothes were on right—yes, he assured himself that they were—and he had washed and brushed. "What in the dickens was the matter?"

He screwed up his courage and followed her. He found himself in a long hall with several closed doors facing him. On opening the nearest he stepped into the kitchen.

"If you don't mind," he started to say, as three women turned startled faces to him—but the one he had seen in the pantry made quickly for a door and disappeared. "That one's an enemy," he commented humorously to himself.

"Oh, I say," he exclaimed as Virginia smilingly approached him. This beautiful woman, who was she? "Well, I never," he continued aloud.

"No, I'm sure you never did," she said laughing at his embarrassment. "Have you lost your way?"

He felt comfortable again in a moment.

"I think I've found it," he laughed back at her. "Say, I'm jolly glad I came. Let's shake."

She gave him her hand, smiling into his eyes. "I am Mrs. Blair, the housekeeper, and I imagine that you have not yet read the rules of this house. When you do, you will understand just what a shock your appearance here is to us."

"I'll be blessed, if this isn't a house of mystery," he said looking about him. "Say, what's the matter with—" he wanted to say "the Doctor" but thought better of it and ended abruptly.

"Come," she said gently, leading him to a side door opening outside. "I presume you are looking for an exit. You will find George about somewhere. The Doctor goes for a walk before breakfast, which" —and here she smiled at him—"will be ready in half an hour."

"Did he look starved?" he thought.

Then she continued as he stepped outside, "There is nothing the matter and this is not a house of mystery—it is a house of pride."

He looked back at her, and she smiled again—but he did not notice that her eyes were misty.

"That's a fine chap," commented Mabel, "but won't those rules and regulations be an eye-opener to him. I wouldn't be afraid to bet a dollar that he'll pick up and leave. Any fellow with spunk would."

"But say, didn't I just get a fright, though," gasped Mary as she reappeared in the kitchen. "Of course, when the door opened I thought it was George. Golly, I could have dropped through the

floor. 'Oh, I say,' he began, but not to me. He's a fresh one, that," she commented as she vigorously stirred the porridge. "And you can knock me down with a feather, if there isn't going to be something doing around these parts before long."

During these remarks Virginia had disappeared.

"Nice mix-up there will be when the girl arrives," Mabel remarked, more to herself than Mary.

"Now just won't there though," said Mary, her eyes brightening. "Golly, I can hardly wait till the fun begins."

"It's none of our concern," chided Mabel, feeling it her duty in Virginia's absence to keep the conversation respectful.

"I don't mean nothin' out of the way," Mary explained. "Only I just happen to be made human. I'm not it, even with a capital I—and sometimes this house does 'get me.' "

Paul greeted his guest with a pleasant "Good morning" and before breakfast was over, with that inner yearning satisfied, and talking pleasantly with an apparently normal host, Robin became more and more convinced that something had gone wrong the night before.

Paul drew the young man out regarding his studies and ambitions, putting many intricate questions to him, and under this treatment Robin revealed many commendable qualities and displayed an insight into his work that might easily have been termed unusual.

Then after breakfast he led him down the hall to his laboratory and there, Robin began the acquaintance of the real Dr. Paul James, surgeon and master of medical science.

The mail was forgotten that morning and lay unopened on the desk in the library till noon.

When Robin went up to his room to wash before lunch, he found the list of rules and regulations lying on his dresser. He read them bewildered. He seemed to have gone back suddenly to the night before—and he had thought it a dream.

"This is no dream," he observed, "these are my 'shall nots' in black and white." He summed them up in this fashion:

"1. 'Thou shalt not show thy face in the rear hall.' (Well he'd broken that already.)

"2. 'Thou shalt not speak to any woman of the household.' (That too, he had broken.)

"3. 'Thou shalt not appear to the east of the house, for that is the women's quarters.' (The beautiful lady had let him out by the east door that morning.)

"4. 'Thou shalt not interfere in any way with the hour for meals. If not there on time—go without.' (Well, he'd broken the first part of that commandment on arriving, and he had also paid the penalty. Had gone without 'much,' he added, which was almost the same thing.)

"5. 'Thou shalt not break any of these rules.'"

"I've broken them all, I've made a bad start, to be

sure," he lamented to himself. "But I've tasted the forbidden pleasures, and if I'm a man I'll leave my sin behind me and reform—but I say, that woman in charge, as she's termed, is a dream and no mistake. I'd even break the commandment again to see her. Now I know what she meant about my appearance being a shock. That was rich, now, wasn't it? And the way the other one bolted." Turning the incidents over in his mind caused him great amusement, and the effect upon him of the rules and regulations was anything but serious.

When he thought of Paul his face became grave. "He's got a grouch on," he told himself. "He's sour on life—something's made him sore."

Paul had been his hero since childhood, and he did not intend to dethrone him. "It was enough," he defended, "to make any man sore. By Jove, it's tough luck—there it hangs by his side, useless—the hand that once held such cunning—that made every one sit up and take notice. Say, R. J.," addressing himself solemnly, "there's some work to be done around here. Sour on women, too. I scent a rat—so that's it—confound the woman, whoever she is—she's a fool."

With his mind filled with these inspiring sentiments, he went down to lunch.

Paul eyed him critically. Robin handed him the rules and regulations. "I've memorised them," he remarked pleasantly.

"They are for you to keep—for reference," Paul's brows puckered.

"No," said Robin, "I know them too well for that. They're all right," looking frankly at Paul, "and I promise. Here's my hand on it." And to Paul's utter amazement he found his hand grasped. There was something about that hand-shake that embarrassed him. It had a quality all its own. For the first time in months Paul felt off his guard. Conscious of this he stiffened and made no further remark, but Robin, undismayed, rambled on, not officious or intrusive, but in such a pleasant way that he could not bring himself to be rude to him.

Already Robin had begun his part, and it seemed to him a jolly good part to play.

CHAPTER XVIII

GEORGE had taken very kindly to the guest. In fact the place seemed different since his arrival. It was as though a heavy cloud had suddenly parted, showing a bit of the blue beyond. There was a mystery, a depression in the air before, which Robin's coming had dispersed. George went about whistling now, before whistling hadn't fitted in, and this change in the atmosphere was felt by the whole household.

Dr. Paul and his peculiarities were not the only subjects of conversation now. Robin had become greatly attached to the two fine riding horses in the stable, and although Paul's order that "no one should ride them but himself" had not been changed, he held high hopes for the future. While he determined that no request should come from him, he hoped that before long Paul would offer him the use of one of them.

Though Paul must have felt something of this, because of Robin's open admiration for them—and his interest in the stable, he kept from any reference to them.

One day, however, much to Robin's surprise, after breakfast, instead of spending the morning as was

their custom in the laboratory, Paul suggested that "he go for a ride."

"Well now, that's jolly—real jolly, I say, but——"

"No buts necessary," said Paul, "it's a grand morning for a ride, and we'll work this afternoon instead."

It was almost unbelievable. Robin could hardly credit it—and Paul was actually grinning at him. (A new diplomatic grin, Paul had found it necessary to adopt lately)—and this change in the iron rules—nothing of the kind had happened before. One rule followed another in monotonous succession—nothing suffered the slightest change. It certainly was puzzling. However, for Robin the joy outweighed the sorrow and he felt that at last life was to be worth living. "But," he couldn't help remarking to himself as he rode away, "I can't get over that grin of the Doctor's."

Had Paul explained it, he would have said, "It means, young man, that I am like a fly caught in a spider's web—the mesh is fast tightening around me, and I am adopting this grin, because I have decided to become politic. I was a fool to be caught—but watch me—I am fighting for my life now—my purpose is inflexible, and when I get out of this trap, well——"

After Robin left, Paul did another strange thing. For the last three mornings he had not shaved (this carelessness was entirely new) and now he went up to his room and deliberately tousled his hair, parted

it all crooked, and put it in as much disorder as possible. Then he put on a most unbecoming tie, crooked, and donned a shabby old coat he had used for the garden, also a pair of frayed trousers, and last but not least, an old tweed cap which he tilted well over one eye. "This will do the trick—it will scare her all right," he said, surveying himself in the mirror.

He did not go downstairs until he heard wheels on the drive and a sweet girlish laugh at the front door. Then he descended.

She was already in the hall and ran to meet him. His manner said: "Keep back, Madam," but she did not heed it. Her face was all smiles, and her hair golden and curled about her forehead. She was dressed in white, and her cheeks were pink with excitement.

"Cousin Paul," she said, her bright blue eyes looking up into his and her hands squeezing his tightly, "I'm so glad to be here, and it was just dear of you to want me. We will be great friends, won't we?"

The grin came in handy now, and he used it to advantage. "So you are glad to be here, are you?" He withdrew his hand as gently as possible—it must be bruised he thought.

"Yes, I'm more than glad," she answered smiling as he led her into the library, and she took off her hat. "It's the one big holiday of my life. I have always wanted to come, and now to be here—seems

almost too good to be true—but I'm so hot—could I have a glass of cold water, Cousin Paul?"

"George," he called; "George," but no reply. George had gone to the stables.

Paul grinned at her. "In a moment as soon as George comes back," he said.

"Show me where the kitchen is," she said, "and I'll get it myself."

"No, no," he said sharply—then more gently, "can't you wait a moment—Betty—is it?"

"Have you forgotten my name?" she asked, a little bewildered. "I guess it just slipped your memory for a moment, didn't it?"

"Betty," he began—to his mind there was no time to be lost. Robin might return at any moment, and he removed his hat to display the confusion before hidden. A strand of hair fell down over his right eye, but he left it undisturbed, and leaned near her while he continued: "This is rather a strange household." Then abruptly, "How old are you?"

Though surprised, she laughed and answered, "Eighteen."

"Well, you're old enough to have a degree of common-sense, so pay great heed to what I am about to say. You are here, and in order that your visit shall be a satisfactory one, you will have to conform to the rules of this house. I have already said that it is a strange one. For many and various reasons which need not be explained, I have had to limit the freedom of its members. I have a 'Woman in

Charge' who runs the domestic part of it and I am going to give you over to her care. She is a peculiar woman, I would say, rather an unnatural one from what I've heard. There are reasons why I never wish to see her or any of her subordinates. I expect you to understand this without asking questions, please. She has a list of rules for you which I will trust to your honour to obey. I have endeavoured to be as generous as possible, restricting you only where it is imperative that you be restricted. As you see," this with a grin and a flourish of his left arm, "I am a queer fellow, and the less you see of me the better. You will no doubt be glad of the rules, I think."

"Am I not to see you?" she asked, somewhat awed by this strange recital.

"Very little, only when I send for you. I am very busy."

The smiles had gone, and her cheeks were pale. "I am sorry," she said, "Mother thought knowing you would be the best part of my holiday. She said that men of your spirit are so rare—that your courage and determination, not to mention your ambition and wonderful achievement, would be a great inspiration to me. You see, Mother has ambitions for me." This last rather hesitatingly.

"What does she want you to be?" he enquired stiffly.

"She would like me to take my degree and then some profession—but I just want to be a nurse."

"Just want to," he repeated.

"Yes, to me nursing sickness back to health seems noble enough. What do you think, Cousin Paul?"

This "Cousin Paul" worried him. He did wish she wouldn't say it. Just now he realised again that the time was passing and saw danger in delay—but this last remark of hers had pleased him. "Yes," he answered very gently, as he ran his fingers through his tousled hair and eyed her intently, "to a noble soul, Betty, nursing is a very noble thing."

Then his manner changed suddenly. "George," he called. This time George appeared. "You will escort this young lady." Then turning to Betty, "Good morning," he said.

There was an air of command in his tone, and she mutely followed George down the hall and through the side door.

"Well I never," said George to himself, after casting a glance at Paul's "make-up." "Now, what in thunder does he mean?"

But aloud he said to Betty, "You'll like Mrs. Blair, Miss; she's a fine, kind woman—and I'm mighty sure we'll all be pleased to do anything we can for you. I hope you won't be lonesome."

Betty's face brightened. "Thank you. No, I won't be lonesome." Then with a loyalty quite unexplainable, "I'm so glad to be here with Cousin Paul."

"Ugh!" said Paul to himself, as he brushed his hair and began to shave. "She might be different,

but I doubt it—if she was put to the test, she'd flunk, just like all others of her sex. No," he concluded, "I will have to be very strict with her—very strict and firm—with them both. There will be no nonsense—the idea——" But his remarks were cut short as his razor needed all his attention—three days' growth meant something.

CHAPTER XIX

"I AM so glad that you are here," Betty said to Virginia for the third time that evening since they had come down into the rose-garden. "Of course," as they began cutting some roses for her room, "Mother has told me so much about Cousin Paul that I felt quite well acquainted with him—but you—it seems too good to be true to have some one like you here, too."

Virginia at once perceived the girl's loyalty, and the reticence that forbade any display of disappointment, and understood so well just what the compliment meant.

"Yes," she replied, slipping a hand into hers, "to me too, the pleasure of having some one like you here is very great, more so because it was so entirely unexpected."

Naturally Virginia had been a surprise to Betty, and at first with the simple trust of youth she had accepted her as part of the Dream Beautiful—that she had cherished for years—a visit to this old home. The peculiarity in the fact of a woman of her position and beauty serving in such a capacity, did not awaken her curiosity until a little later on—after she understood better the restrictions imposed upon

and submitted to by the whole household. The little list of rules, which Virginia had handed to her as her personal guide, opened the way to a clearer comprehension of the situation, especially after she had questioned Virginia about them.

"Does Cousin Paul never see any one?" she asked.

"He does not wish to see us," Virginia hesitated, hoping that Betty would not probe too deep. The knowledge of Robin's presence in the house had to be kept from her. Following the order that this was imperative, she had sent back her promise of obedience and her word must be kept.

"Well, how is it managed?" she queried much puzzled. "Who serves his meals, for instance?"

"George attends to that," said Virginia. "You see, it is the Doctor's wish and really George has become quite competent."

"Yes, but has he never seen you?" continued the girl.

Virginia blushed and turned away to hide her confusion. "You mean," she said, "has he seen me in the garden? Well, dear, I cannot say, but I should judge that he has had no curiosity to do so."

"If he only could," said Betty. "I'm quite sure——" then she ended confused.

"No," supplemented Virginia, smiling at the girl, "the rules wouldn't be changed—if that's what you mean."

"However, I'm going to tell him about you," she

said to herself, but aloud, "Don't you think he must be lonesome sometimes? Does he never see any one but George?"

"There are very few people about here," Virginia was confused.

"But does no one from the city come out to see him?"

"No, dear, he has no callers. I think it is his wish to be left entirely alone. You see," hastened Virginia, anxious to explain anything explainable, "he is busy a great part of the time in the laboratory. He enjoys that."

"Do you think," said Betty, "that he would be cross if I broke my rules sometimes and went in to see him?"

This impulsiveness had to be checked at once. "You must never do that, Betty. Your cousin would be very angry indeed. Promise me that you will not."

"I didn't mean to," answered Betty, "only it would be fun, wouldn't it? I think," she continued shyly, "that I won't promise yet—at least not until I see Cousin Paul again."

"I fear," said Virginia to herself, "that this young lamb will not be altogether docile."

"When do you think he will send for me?" Betty enquired.

"Not likely for sometime," Virginia answered as she thought truthfully. So, when a little later George

came with a message that Paul wished to see her, she was as much surprised as delighted.

One of the horses had sprained its leg and Robin was busily engaged binding it up. Paul had taken advantage of this interval to send for Betty, instructing George at the same time "to see to it that Robin did not return to the house for an hour."

During the day Paul had found himself turning over in his mind, the rude reception accorded to Betty on her arrival. He thought of his liking for her mother, and the loyalty to each other that had existed between them for years—of the miserable injustice meted out to her by the rest of the James family—and then of the sweetness and trust of Betty herself. These thoughts were not to his liking—for he found himself growing tender under their influence—but nevertheless, no matter how he repulsed them, they continually reasserted themselves, until in order to rid himself of them completely, he sent for her. She deserved a little fairer treatment he concluded.

As he greeted her, he did not look like the same man—of course not—how could he?

But only her smile (could it have been interpreted right) showed her surprise.

He met her cordially, and placed a chair for her beside his; while in through the open window came the breath of roses.

"I was busy this morning—and hadn't much time to see you," he explained pleasantly.

"Oh, I understood," Betty answered. "You see, I knew that you must want me, when you asked me—and I knew too that you would have said so had you not been too busy to think of it."

"Yes, yes," assented Paul, somewhat confused. "Just so." Then abruptly, "Have you had a pleasant day?"

"Yes, it has been lovely," said Betty, seizing this opportunity to extol Mrs. Blair's attractions. "Mrs. Blair is so unusual—a perfect lady—and so beautiful. I fell in love with her immediately."

"Whom do you mean?" asked Paul sharply.

"Why," said Betty in surprise, "the housekeeper."

"The Woman in Charge," Paul laughed cynically. "So she's beautiful, is she? Well, child—beauty's only skin deep. You must not let her influence you because of that."

"But she is lovely, too," said Betty in loyalty to her new friend.

"'Lovely and beautiful,' what delightful adjectives," laughed the cynic again. "A beautiful woman, Betty, is like a flower—the petals of which are delicate and alluring—but little insects eat into the heart. The insects are selfishness, false pride and vanity. You have to look right down into her heart, child. It's the heart that counts."

Betty was beginning to understand. This speech of Paul's had been illuminating. To her active brain the rôle of nurse had suggested itself. This would

be her case. "Something has made him bitter," she said to herself. "I will cure that."

A fine old piano stood in the further corner of the room. Betty had noticed it on her arrival, and her fingers ached to caress its keys. Her mother had denied her nothing that was within her reach financially, and Betty had displayed rather special musical ability. A thought had come to her which she at once decided to act upon.

She stood up and laid her hand gently upon Paul's shoulder. "I'm going to sing for you, Cousin Paul," she said, very sweetly.

He was too surprised to speak, and sat there confused and dumfounded, while she sang to him.

It was a sweet song about "Holding on to faith" and "A heart of gold," but he did not hear it, for the thought that she sat there singing and playing on his mother's piano—and that he allowed her to do it—and to sing love songs to him in that room—almost staggered him. It was his reward for "flunking," he commented bitterly to himself.

She finished and turned to him.

He did not look up, for his thoughts were so deep and dark that the sudden ending of the song had not aroused him.

She thought that his heart had been touched and came over to him. "Cousin Paul," she said, blushing deeply.

He looked up and his face was so set and hard that she stood back a little. He just stared at her—

and she felt herself growing pale. Then suddenly, though the hard lines did not leave his mouth, he smiled—"his new smile"—and when he spoke the words almost stunned her. "You had better go back now, Betty. I am not fond of music. Good night."

She turned like a hurt thing and left him, the hot tears filling her eyes as she walked away. "I am a fool—I have only angered him," she sobbed, as in her own room she pressed her tear-stained face into the petals of the roses that filled the rose-bowl. "A beautiful woman hasn't insects eating into her heart—she's just like a rose—a pure, fragrant rose, and I'll have to get him to think so, somehow."

Virginia, hearing the sobbing, had stolen in quietly, and her cool hand now rested on the bowed head. "Tears and roses, Betty," she said gently. "The morning dew would be better for them."

"Cousin Paul says that a beautiful woman is like a rose with insects eating into its heart," explained Betty. "It's not true, and I've only angered him."

"What did you do?" questioned Virginia, drawing the girl to a lounge by the window.

"I sang for him," she said simply.

"And did that anger him?"

"It must have. I thought he would like it."

Virginia looked at the fair face and then beyond—into the little garden where the setting sun cast its rays upon the roses. "Your cousin," she began as though to herself, "has lost faith with life. He sees the clouds, but not the blue behind. Because he

thought he saw insects at the heart of one rose, he ranks all alike. Pain and disappointment colour all his windows. He has a foe to fight," here her voice was almost a whisper, "and—he must win out."

"Win out?" echoed Betty.

Virginia looked up quickly. "Yes, dear—try again, won't you? He wasn't angry with you—he was angry with himself."

"Was it that?" said the girl, her face brightening. "Then I am going to try again. He's worth many more tries—and I'll just take my courage in my hands—like the braves of old—and I'll win, too."

While Betty sang to Paul strains of the song reached Robin as he bound up the sprained ankle of the mare in the stable. "George," he called excitedly, "listen—what's that?"

George was equally surprised, and his legs felt weak. "Somebody's singing down the road," he ventured, feeling that it was a lie.

Again the sweet tones floated their way.

"I say, man," said Robin, "it's at the house. It is."

"If it is," said George, trying to recover himself, "the place is haunted."

Robin forgot the bandage and the mare became restless.

"Some woman's singing in the house," he announced, as he completed his task. "And I'm going to see who it is."

"Wait a jiffy," called George, disappearing into

a doorway. "Wait a moment," he kept calling. "Don't go yet."

The singing stopped and Robin listened—it did not begin again. He waited for George.

"Now look here," he seized the man's shoulder, "tell me straight. Do you know who is in there singing?"

"I do not," said George emphatically. It was a half lie and needed the emphasis.

"I don't believe you," said Robin as he turned and walked toward the house. "Not on your life—I don't believe a word of it."

George let him go—he knew that only by force could he detain him now.

Paul did not look up as Robin entered the room. No one else was there and the piano was closed.

Carelessly, as if without intention, Robin walked over to it and tried the case. It was locked. He whistled softly to himself, then sat down and began to smoke. He remained silent a long time while Paul appeared engrossed in his book.

Robin broke the silence. "I say, Doctor, do you believe in ghosts?"

Paul did not look up or answer.

"Well, I do," Robin went on. "Definition of a ghost—Music—then a clear sweet voice in the stillness—it soars—then drops into silence—and is no more."

Just then Paul got up and went out of the room. Robin waited a moment, then he opened the cup-

board door. The cupboard was empty. He looked behind the heavy window hangings—there was no one there.

"Where does he keep her?" he muttered to himself.

CHAPTER XX

ROBIN lay awake long into the night. That song still puzzled him. Indeed the more he thought of it, the more confused he became. Some one had played the piano—some one had been singing—who was it?

Because of the rules and regulations he thought that it could not be any one belonging to the house. Then it must have been some visitor—or was Dr. Paul playing a double game? Was this grouch against women all a fizzle and a hoax, just to cover up some secret love affair? All sorts of wild, impossible thoughts came into his mind, and though he felt that most of them had to be discarded, he knew that a woman had been singing, and judging from the attitude of both Dr. Paul and George, he felt that there was a secret about it that was not to be revealed.

Then he sat up quickly and listened. There was some noise downstairs, and whispering voices in the hall. He got up and, slipping on his robe, opened the door very softly and listened.

Something was being moved along the downstairs hall. Everything was in darkness. Could it be a thief?

He went quickly to Paul's door. It was open and he looked in. Paul was not there, and the bed was untouched.

"This is no thief," he said to himself with a grin.

He peered over the bannister and could barely discern two dark figures with something much bigger and darker between them which they were slowly moving down the hall. "Look out for the corner," he heard Paul's voice snap out in a sort of sharp semi-whisper.

As they proceeded Robin followed slowly down the stairs a step at a time, peering over the railing in his effort to make out just what the object was between them. Then he whistled softly. "It's the piano," he said to himself. "Well, I say, this is a house of mystery, and no mistake."

Down the side hall the figures went—he heard some one fumble with a key in a lock—then Paul's voice again: "Take it in alone, George; I can't enter that room yet." The snap had gone from his voice. It was weary now and full of pain.

Robin turned and slowly mounted the stairs. Those last words of Dr. Paul's seemed to change everything. He felt ashamed of his prying curiosity. He wanted to slip back into his room without being heard. Something was wrong: there was a big heart-ache in the house. He felt it now, and at once all comedy left the situation. "Why had they put the piano in the locked room opposite the laboratory—the room no one ever entered?" he asked himself

as he stood by the window and looked up at the stars. "And why would Dr. Paul not enter it yet?"

A little later he heard him come up to his room —his step slow and tired—and Robin wished that he might grasp his hand tightly and say something —he didn't know what—only something human and kind.

The next morning no allusion was made to the absence of the piano in the library and the routine of the day went on as usual, only George wore a very meek look, especially when Robin was about—a look which that young man found hard to interpret.

Gradually the depression of the night wore away and Robin decided to exhibit a little further curiosity by putting a few catchy questions to George whenever place and opportunity permitted.

A few nights later, while Paul took his usual ride, Robin followed George to the stable and, after taking a look at the mare's sprained ankle, asked bluntly, "Does Mrs. Blair sing?"

The man looked up and then laughed—and laughed—that big hearty laugh so natural to him. "Not that I ever heard," he answered frankly.

Robin continued, "Has she a piano in her rooms?"

"Now how would I know, to be sure?" George laughed again.

"Yes, you do know," said Robin determinedly. "Has she?"

"No, she has not," said George, going on with his work.

"Have you a piano in your house?" Robin kept at it, so intent was he upon clearing up the mystery, that he lost sight of the method employed.

"No, sir," replied George sharply.

"Now, look here," said Robin, taking hold of the man's arm. "Make it a bit easy for me, won't you?"

The twinkle came back to the man's eye, while he grinned broadly. "'Tain't worth your trouble, young man. You can't work it out. Give it up—give it up."

"Not on your life, George," Robin answered, laughing now as he walked away. "I'm after that voice, and be she fairy or ghost—I'll have her yet."

A few moments after he left, a gentle voice from somewhere whispered: "George."

"Yes?" he whispered back.

"Are you alone?"

"Sure. Come along," he called pleasantly, and Betty entered through a rear door.

"You were talking to some one as I came. I listened at the door and heard voices. Was it Cousin Paul?" She stood beside him.

"No," said George.

"Who was it, then?"

"Just a man," he replied.

"Oh," said the girl, "a new neighbour?"

"Yes, a new neighbour."

"Where does he live?"

"Over there," pointing in the direction of the barn door.

"Are they nice people? I thought Mrs. Blair said there were no near neighbours."

"Well," said George, drawing a deep breath, "neither there are. This chap's a bachelor."

"Oh," said she. "Does he live alone?"

"No, he don't." George was greatly puzzled as to just how to proceed should this questioning continue.

It stopped for the moment as Betty went over beside the mare and stroked her glossy brown neck. "Poor thing," she said, "is the ankle any better? You're an expert at bandaging, George."

George grinned and turned away. "I didn't do it," he replied, mischief in his eyes.

"Did you have a doctor?"

He nodded. "That was the doctor chap who was here a minute ago." He began to enjoy the situation.

"A veterinary surgeon, you mean, George."

"No, miss," said he, laughing now. "Just a plain Doctor chap, nice and handsome, and rich. Now don't that sound interesting?"

Betty laughed. "It does, but I think you're fooling, George, for I heard the man say that he was going hunting."

"Hunting?" George looked up aghast. "Going hunting?"

"Yes," said Betty. "He said he'd have her yet. What was he going to shoot?"

George laughed—then he sat down and shook

with laughter. "Sure, miss, you're right," he chuckled. "The Doctor chap's after big game." Then he laughed so much that she grew embarrassed. "Sorry, miss," he explained, "but there's something about this here huntin' scheme that's just struck my funny bone. I'd like to tell you, but you see, it's just a man's affair. I shouldn't let you come here, anyway. The mare will soon be fit again, and perhaps if you get on the right side of the Doctor, he'd let you ride her sometimes. Sure, she's idle most of the day."

"No one saw me last night," she said, "and it's great fun stealing out. I wanted to see how the mare's leg was progressing, and, besides," her eyes twinkling, "it's nicer outside the gate."

"Well, miss," said George, "it mayn't be nice to be restricted, but it's the law—and them that break the law run risks."

"I like running risks, but I'll go now," she said, smiling back at him as she disappeared through the rear door.

It was late that night when Paul rode in, and as George looked at his haggard face a great understanding and tenderness shone in his eyes. They did not speak nor did Paul look up as he turned and walked slowly toward the house.

"He's putting up a game fight," George said to himself, "and he's pretty sure to win out—I reckon."

CHAPTER XXI

SOME few days after this Robin hit upon a novel plan. He had brought his violin with him, but so far had deemed it wise to leave it alone and had not even mentioned the fact of having it with him.

All during the day his spirits had been high. Nothing could dampen his good humour. Paul noted this and so did George. Something like a faint suspicion had been growing in Paul's mind lately. He had not sent for Betty since the night she had sung for him—and she was apparently content. He wondered just what was taking up her attention, and Robin had of late been singularly light-hearted, and Paul thought that the sparkling eyes held a new merriment.

Besides, there was something indefinable in the air that caught his attention, and he found himself surmising as to what it might be. George remarked to himself that he "guessed the hunt was on," and kept a sharp lookout.

As evening came on, Paul started off on his nightly ride, but at the gate drew rein sharply as though hesitating about something—then in a moment went on again.

Robin was up in his room, and watched Paul ride away. Then he deliberately placed a chair by the open window and, taking his violin from its case, began to play softly the low, sweet notes of a melody. Gradually, as Paul rode further and further away, the tones became grander and flooded the still summer night with their wonderful harmony. "This should catch her," he whispered to himself, grinning. "By George, this should get her, all right. Now, fairy—or ghost, appear." He stood up as he played and watched the lawn. "Come forth," he called softly. "I say, do come forth, won't you?"

But no fairy appeared on the green before him.

"I'll play some more, anyway," he said, and then, as he went from one melody to another, the strains of the music floated out into the night's stillness, and as he finished he laid his violin on the table beside him and leaned out of the window.

All was still, only a bird twittered in the branches near—just a low, sweet twitter of happiness.

"By Jove," he said. "I hope she heard."

Then he noticed a light in the stables and went downstairs and out to see George, "to note the effect" he grinned to himself.

Betty had been sitting on the steps leading down to the rose-garden, attempting to read by the last dim light of the sun when the first notes of the violin reached her. She listened, then as the music became clearer and clearer, she put her book down on the step beside her, and, after looking around furtively,

ran quickly down the steps and softly out of the gate, and made her way through the shrubbery at the foot of the lawn over to the west side of the house.

She glanced up, the music came from an upstairs window, she felt sure; but she could see no one. She kept well into the shadow and listened. She was almost trembling with excitement. Who could it be? Some one who knew how to play—and it was not Cousin Paul, for he was out riding—and no one else but George was about. Then she became frightened, for the music had ceased and some one came out of the house and passed down the little path near her leading to the barns. She drew back still further into the shadow, then, turning, she ran quickly along the edge of the green and through the little gate into the rose-garden.

Virginia stood waiting for her. "Betty," she said somewhat reproachfully, "where have you been?"

But Betty was in no mood to be reproved. Taking Virginia's arm in hers she led her to the little green summer-house in the corner of the garden. "Now," she said, still frightened and bewildered and very much in earnest, "Mrs. Blair, can you tell me who was playing the violin in one of the upstairs rooms a few moments ago—or was I dreaming?"

Virginia had an idea that the player was Robin, yet she had no assurance of this. "Indeed, I can't say," she evaded.

"But there was some one," Betty persisted.

"Yes, I heard it," said Virginia. Then, glancing

at Betty, perceived how truly frightened the girl was. "But, don't worry about it. The place is not haunted or anything like that. If the violin was played in the house—a real person played it."

"But Cousin Paul is out and there is no one but George left. Did George play it?"

"No, it wasn't George. I'm quite sure of that."

"And, besides," said Betty, "a young man came out of the house and passed by where I stood on the path, leading to the barn. Has Cousin Paul a visitor?"

Betty thought she had a clue and eagerly waited Virginia's answer.

"Has he a visitor?" repeated Virginia in an effort to gain time. Quibbling was not a game to her liking, and she made poor work of it.

"Yes," said Betty, all beaming now, as she looked up into the other's puzzled countenance. "He has a visitor, hasn't he, Mrs. Blair?"

This had to end, Virginia thought. She was sworn to secrecy and Betty must know no more, so with all the dignity she could summon she said: "Betty, you are well aware that your cousin does not consult me regarding his actions. I know nothing of his affairs, and can give you no information whatever. However, I would advise you to confine yourself after this to the rose-garden. Breaking the rules will gain you nothing. You have wandered away several times already, and I would not recommend the further continuance of this practice. Besides——"

"Who is he?" Betty interrupted, laughing gaily as she tilted Virginia's face up to the moonlight. "Honour bright, tell the truth."

"Betty," reproved Virginia, trying her best to assume a tone of severity.

"Yes, Betty," said that young lady saucily. "Betty is not asleep. There is a secret about—oh, yes, I know there is—and I am—oh, well," she added, laughing, "we won't just say what I'm going to do about it, will we?"

"You must remember," cautioned Virginia, "not to displease your cousin."

"No, I won't; I like him too much," said the girl seriously. "Cousin Paul is a dear—just a cranky, bearish dear—trying as hard as he can to be ugly and sour—and all that—but I'll melt him yet." Then she laughed again, "If I get the chance, I will—and I'll find out—oh, yes, I will——"

Just what she would find out was said under her breath as she ran gaily up the stairs to her room, leaving Virginia alone in the little green summer-house.

"Something will happen, I know it," she said to herself. "They will meet—these two young people will meet—Paul cannot prevent it—and I won't tell any more lies about it. If he's bitter himself, he can't make all others like him. No indeed—let them meet if they will—and maybe love, too—if it happen—for they are young and tender and were meant for it."

Then, as she walked to the steps, the moonlight fell full upon her beautiful face, illuminating it with a rare loveliness. "A woman was meant for love," she breathed softly, her voice almost a caress, "and I know now—that it is the greatest thing in the world."

After dismounting that night at the stable Paul looked at George, then asked abruptly: "There is something in the air, George. What has happened?"

"Nothing much, as I know of, sir," George began.

"Yes, you do," said Paul; "out with it."

At this George motioned to the barn with a gesture of caution.

"What's she doing in there?" Paul questioned sharply.

George became desperate. "It's him, sir," he whispered. "And he's been——"

"Yes, go on—he's been what?"

"Playing his fiddle a bit, sir," continued George, torn between two loyalties.

"Playing his fiddle?" said Paul, incredulous at this announcement.

Just then Robin appeared in the doorway. He had overheard, and preferred to defend himself.

"Doctor," he smiled serenely, "I thought I'd try my violin to-night. Hope you don't mind?"

Paul realised that the occasion called for diplomacy, so, grinning benignly upon Robin, he began, "I am peculiar about music. It affects me strangely—so much so that I cannot have it at all—not at all—

you understand, I hope?" Then, weary of this apology, he blurted out in his characteristic fashion: "See here, Robin—I don't want to hear that fiddle about the place. I won't have it, do you hear?" Then, turning abruptly, he began walking toward the house. Robin overtook him, apparently not at all hurt by this new restriction.

"Sorry," he said kindly. "By Jove, Doctor, I'm sorry if I've overstepped, or anything like that, but it was jolly to have a tune again—besides," this hesitatingly as he watched Paul's face intently, "I had an idea that you liked music—in fact, I thought you were jolly fond of it."

Paul did not answer, but quickened his pace.

"Besides," continued the tormentor, "I'm fanciful —you know. Did you ever hear the tale, Doctor, about the beautiful fairy that haunted the old house down in Tennessee, and how she would sing love songs—playing on her fairy harp—or—was it a piano?"

But Paul had gained the front door and closed himself in the library. He had made no answer, but there was a smile on his lips—a rare old smile that had not been there for many a long day.

As Robin went up to his room he hummed a tune —the same melody he had played to the fairy that night. "Yes, once upon a time, there was a beautiful fairy," he sang softly, "and she lived in a rose-garden —not far from here." Then the song stopped abruptly while he stood still before the mirror in his

room and surveyed himself. "I've an idea," he said, while his eyes twinkled with merriment. "Robin James, I've a jolly fine idea."

Then quickly he turned out his light and went into the hall. Leaning over the railing he listened. Paul was still in the library and likely to remain there for some time, reading, he thought—so he went downstairs very softly and stole past the library and, gently opening the front door, went out. He chuckled to himself as he ran into the shadow of the trees skirting the lawn and made his way around the house to the rear, hiding in the deep shadows as he went, and every little while stopping to listen. "I'll find out once for all," he said. "I'll see where this song fairy lives."

Reaching the rose-garden, he peeked over the gate —no one was there. He opened it and entered. "I'm on holy ground," he laughed softly, though he wondered what he would do if the tall, beautiful lady—the Woman in Charge—should suddenly appear. He noticed the little winding stair and a light in the window above. "It's worth it," he whispered to himself. "I'll risk it."

Then he went slowly up the stairs—but how they did creak—he thought each step would be his undoing. But no one opened a window to shout at him —everything was quiet. A faint breeze stirred the tree-tops, and the moon cast her silvery beams over everything, transfiguring the earth into a veritable fairyland. "Now, little fairy," said Robin under

his breath, as he crouched by the window and peered in through the tiny space left between the blind and the sill, "I'll see what you look like." An exclamation of surprise almost escaped him, as right before him in a big armchair by the window sat a girl reading. "Ha! ha!—a real fairy—golden hair and blue eyes—or just wait till she lifts them—I think they are blue—sure," said he gaily to himself, perfectly amazed at his discovery. "So this is where the song fairy lives. This is where he keeps her. Now, who is she?"

Still asking himself this question he moved away quietly from the window, lest he should be discovered, and descended the steps into the garden. "A charming rose-garden," he further commented as he quickly explored the little green summer-house, and noted the sundial in the middle of the green. "A romantic spot." Then softly, under his breath, "The sly old duck."

"Just watch me," he continued as he slowly made his way along the shadows back to the front entrance. "I'll entice this little fairy out of her garden. R. J., this is getting to be a very interesting place."

Then he began thinking of the girl's face. "It seems familiar—now, doesn't it? Jolly familiar—I say—but who is she—who is she?"

After lunch the following day Robin stayed for hours down in a little grove of pine trees which lay quite a distance to the rear of the house, and hidden

by a slight hill. A winding, rocky stream flowed in the gully between the hill and the pine grove, and a much overhung and little-used path led down through the fields to this quiet, sweet-scented spot.

He was evidently quite well satisfied with his afternoon's excursion, for he sat until late that night in the library with Paul, chatting on books, and then entering into a more serious discussion on the theme of the morning's study in the laboratory, all interest in the fiddle and fairy apparently suspended for the time being.

As they talked, a figure in white stole out of the rose-garden gate and entered into the shadow. She tripped airily along, escaping the dew of the long grass, yet fearful of the open—lest she be seen and discovered. She made her way quickly along the lawn to the west side of the house, then stole softly into the shadow by the wall to a lighted window, where she stopped suddenly and listened.

There were voices inside. "This secret visitor, no doubt, and Cousin Paul. I will see," she said. "I will see who this visitor is—who sits at the window and plays the violin."

She leaned nearer—the blind was up and the window open. What if she should be caught—what then?

"I explained that to you, if you remember," Paul was saying, "about three weeks ago—just shortly after you came. This treatment has the same effect on wounds of a septic nature as——"

She drew back again into the shadow. "So he had been there three weeks—a week before she came." This was astounding.

Another voice was speaking, and she leaned over again, and this time peeked in. Robin sat at the further end of the room, facing her, and he was speaking. "Yes, Doctor, this treatment of the sterilisation of infected wounds has always interested me greatly—especially since your experience——"

Then her foot loosened a stone and she drew back again in fear.

No one had heard, and she took her courage in her hands again and once more looked in. Robin was still speaking. "When mother used to bring me to visit you, my ambition was aroused. Your father—and you——"

She drew again into the shadows, and began slowly retracing her way back to the rose-garden. "So he visited Cousin Paul with his mother years ago," she soliloquised, "and knew Cousin Paul's father—and he's been here three weeks—and he plays the violin—and where have I seen him before?—let me think—somewhere, I know. I'll puzzle it out. So he's the secret from me—and likely I am a secret from him. That is funny—but who is he?—who is he?" And thus puzzling Betty went slowly in by the rose-garden gate and sat down on the steps. "Besides, where is the piano?" she queried.

She sat looking up at the moon a long time—in fact, until Virginia called to her softly that "It was nearly midnight and not much time for beauty sleep left."

CHAPTER XXII

BETTY had adopted the habit of each sunny afternoon taking a book or her sewing down to the pine grove lying away to the rear of the house, and hidden from view by the slight hill which rose out of the gully, where the stream, span by an old rustic bridge, frolicked and fumed as it formed little waterfalls over the stones here and there, on its way to the verdant pastures beyond.

One day as she tripped merrily down the old winding path, overhung by wild vines which arched overhead from one branch to another, she sang softly to herself, while her eyes were brimming with merriment.

She had on her prettiest frock and dainty shoes to match, while a sheer, fluffy hat, with a crown of roses, fell carelessly behind, caught under her chin by a narrow pink ribbon.

A few days before she had gone down the same path in running shoes and plain cotton frock—but to-day—well, to-day was different.

Several times as she rambled on she stopped suddenly to listen, then laughing gently to herself ran on again, until in a little while she came to the rustic bridge spanning the dancing, frolicking stream.

Reaching this she looked shyly about on either side. Her cheeks were very pink and her eyes bright, and as she crossed the bridge she hummed a little tune —very low—just loud enough for any one near to hear. It was the tune the violin played one night from an upstairs window a week or so before.

After crossing the bridge she sat down demurely beneath a heavy hanging oak tree which stood almost alone in this grove of pines, and sedately took her sewing from a dainty bag she had carried over her arm.

A robin redbreast sang in the bough above her, and she looked up and smiled at him. A little squirrel came as near as he dared and chattered strange things to her. She listened, and looking up shook her finger at him. She told him "to cease his chattering, that she was just going to sit there and sew as long as she wished—so he might as well come down and be friends."

At that something fell from the branches above into her sewing below. Her cheeks flushed as she picked it up. She opened it and on it was written in a bold, strong hand, "How do you do, Fairy?"

She tossed the note aside and went on with her sewing. In a moment another one dropped in the crown of her hat—she left it there unheeding. The little squirrel began chattering again, and, without looking up, she called gently, "When are you coming down, little squirrel?"

In a moment another bit of folded paper fluttered

down and dropped at the toe of her dainty white shoe. She glanced at it quickly, then bent down and picked it up. It read: "I'm well-nigh discouraged, Fairy—won't you look up and smile—besides, I think the branch will break in a minute. My name is Robin Adair. Can I come down and find out yours?"

"Robin," she repeated to herself. "It comes in a dream to me—he couldn't be that Robin—could he? I wonder."

Then she got up and walked over to the rustic bridge and stood there, leaning over the railing looking into the stream beneath.

She heard a step approach her, but she did not look around—then a voice: "Fairy, by your leave, may I touch your hat to see if you're real—and if you're real, will you turn and smile, please."

She turned and they stood laughing and looking at one another.

Then she scowled at him. "Sir, you are a stranger. Where do you hail from?"

"I hail from the House of Mystery in the Land of Don't. Where lies your sunny bower, Fairy?"

"Sir, I am no fairy," she replied scornfully. "I live in a House of Dreams—beyond yonder hill. There is a garden to my house, and I sit there alone all day. Pray, sir, in your House of Mystery in the Land of Don't, what do you do all the day long? Do you sit at the window and play on the strings of your harp?"

"Fairy," said he—"for I will have to call you that till you tell me a sweeter name—come with me," and he led her back to the shade of the oak tree, "and I will tell you a tale of a day gone by—a tale strange and weird, of the House of Mystery in the Land of Don't. There was the sound of music by night and a voice of sweet singing filled the rose-scented air—but it ceased suddenly, and all was still—not even a footstep was heard of the singer retreating, as she vanished into the night. Fairy, can you tell me aught of her? Think you, did she hail from your Garden of Roses?"

She turned her head away and did not answer.

"Then I bethought me of my violin—and straightway with my bow I played a melody—thinking to wile the sweet singer from her hiding place into the open, and with my song I called to her—but she did not come—or pay heed to me—then I determined to find her, and I think—she is here beside me," glancing at her. "Is she?"

"Sir, your wisdom is great; but tell me, think you that your House of Mystery in the Land of Don't, and my House and Garden of Dreams—do they join one another?"

"They are the same," he said. "Won't you tell me your name, Fairy?"

"It is Betty," she said, watching him intently.

"Betty," he repeated gently. "Betty." He was looking not at her, but beyond, as though a vision rose before his eyes. Then quickly he turned to her.

"Robin is my name. Think you, have you heard it before?"

"No, stranger," she answered lightly, "never before—and now, good-day to you—I must go."

"Will you come back to-morrow?"

"To-morrow I walk in the garden with the Woman in Charge," she said, making her way over to the little bridge.

He smiled. "Then the next day?" He followed her.

"The next day I walk in the garden with the Woman in Charge."

"Then the next day, Betty?" he called.

"The next day I walk in the garden," she sang, as she tripped down the mossy path into the wood, her voice becoming fainter as she sped on out of his sight, up the hill, to her House of Dreams.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONE day, about this time, George arrived home from the city highly pleased with himself. The much coveted gramophone had been purchased, and with it, according to George's judgment, a number of very fine records. On the evening of its arrival the complete programme had been put on and was happily (?) over by the time of Paul's return from his ride, so that a few days elapsed before he was aware of its presence.

He had sent word to Betty that every Monday afternoon between the hours of five and six (the time of day when Robin went for his horseback ride) he would see her in the library. "It was necessary," he had argued with himself, "that he should see her sometimes, and as she was his guest she was surely entitled to a bit of courtesy. This was only fair—besides, because she was her mother's child—she deserved some consideration. Robin will be safely away by that time, and there is nothing to fear," he reasoned.

Betty looked very pretty and fresh as she answered his summons. The two weeks in Mrs. Blair's care had done wonders for her. The roses had

come back to her cheeks, and Paul thought that she seemed the embodiment of life and beauty.

He watched to note if she missed the piano, but she appeared not to, and made no enquiry about it. This pleased him greatly; in fact, she seemed to have lost all curiosity regarding anything about the place, and he noted this with interest.

"Are you content and happy?" he asked, as at her request they walked in his garden and he showed her the roses which were his special care. Compared with his, their little rose-garden seemed very insignificant, she thought.

She answered that "She was very happy and content, and just loved Mrs. Blair."

"The Woman in Charge?" he said.

"Yes, but why do you call her that?"

"Because she is just that," said he; "the Woman in Charge. Aside from that I have no interest in her. I even forget her name. I don't want to have anything to do with her or any woman, for that matter."

"What about me?" she asked.

"You are not a woman yet, and when you are I won't care for you, either."

"Even if you're not pleasant, Cousin Paul," she retorted, "you are at least frank—but tell me, why don't you want to see Mrs. Blair? What do you know about her?"

"Well," he began bitterly, "in the first place she's a woman—that's enough right at the outset—then

she killed her poor husband by her continual nagging at him—of course that's an ordinary tragedy—then she hates all men I believe,—a real live man-hater. Now, child, what is there attractive about a woman like that? And last, but not least, she tells a sad tale—and I despise people who beg for sympathy."

"You don't like women, do you, so why——"

"Now that's an idea," he commented. "Why should the pot call the kettle black? It is inconsistent, isn't it? But even if you pass that over, what about her nagging?"

"Now, now," Betty laughed, "I believe you're just making fun of her. Let me tell you about her."

"No, don't, please."

"Yes, just a little," she hurried on, for she thought Paul not quite fair to her. "She is beautiful——"

"Yes, you said that before."

"But she is—the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and," she added coyly, "she likes you."

"Likes me? Now that's a joke, isn't it? I am sorry, Betty, but I'm not interested. Let us change the subject."

Betty was hurt. "Well, well, go on," he said. "Go on and finish it. Then don't mention her again, please. Understand?"

But Betty did not speak.

"Go on," he said gently.

"She said some nice things about you," Betty con-

tinued. "In fact, she made me understand you better."

"This is interesting. How did she enlighten you?" with a curl of his lip.

"She said that you only saw the clouds, and not the blue behind—that you were wrong about the insects being in a woman's heart."

"Did you tell her what I said?" he asked sharply.

"Yes," she confessed.

He glanced at her a moment, and as he looked the expression of his countenance changed to one of great bitterness. "Child," he said at length, "learn to keep some things to yourself. Learn it now while you're young—and don't copy this woman or speak of her again—please."

Before Betty returned to the other rose-garden she asked for some of his roses, so he cut some for her, "and just a few for her," she requested on leaving.

"For Mrs. Blair? Sure." Then he cut a large full bloom. "Here's one for your Mrs. Blair, and there are little insects in its heart—tell her to look and see."

Betty took the rose from him and looked into its heart. He was laughing that harsh characteristic laugh of his, and she stood wondering what to do.

Suddenly she turned and faced him. "Cousin Paul," she said, looking up into his face while her eyes were misty, "I want to tell you that you're melting—and you don't know it." Then she ran down

the path too fearful at what she had said to look back. "I had to say it," she kept saying to herself. "I had to say it—for I want him to think—a bit about it."

"I'm melting," he sneered. "I'm melting, am I? She thinks so, and that I don't know it. What childishness, what folly! Why, child, I am getting as hard as flint. Of course I am. Just as hard as flint—and as bitter as gall—just that—and I see the clouds and not the blue behind—do I? Now, how does she know, this beautiful man-hating Woman in Charge, this so-called Mrs. Blair? How in blazes does she know?"

"These roses," said Betty on her return to their sitting-room, "are out of Cousin Paul's garden, and though his garden is much larger than ours, our roses are just as beautiful."

"Yes," said Virginia, inhaling the fragrance of his roses, "I think many of them are the same variety."

"You have seen it, then?" asked Betty, holding in her hand the full-blown rose Paul had sent to the Woman in Charge.

"Yes." Virginia hesitated about any explanation that would call for curiosity as to her position there.

"Do you like this rose?" asked the girl holding out the rose to her.

"The shade is exquisite, but it is too full-blown."

"Look into its heart. I told Cousin Paul that you said his idea of a woman's heart wasn't true—and he sent this rose to you."

Virginia felt herself grow pale. Could Paul have any idea of her true identity, or was all this discussion mere accident? As she turned away, confused, Betty's next remark came as a thunderbolt.

"Did you have any children, Mrs. Blair?"

"Why, what do you mean?" Virginia started to say, but halted—her name was Mrs. Blair—she had forgotten that for a moment. She blushed crimson. "No, I never had," she answered, turning her face away.

"I'm so sorry," said the girl gently. "You must miss your husband terribly, Mrs. Blair."

Virginia tried to grip herself and answer in a manner becoming a widow, but "Yes, I do," was all she could say.

"Was he dark or fair?" went on Betty, very sympathetically.

"I don't—he was fair—I think."

"I'd love to see his picture," said the girl, looking up expectantly.

Virginia trembled. "How could she escape?"

"You know," went on Betty, with a roguish look in her eyes, "my father died when I was very little, and mother and I often look at his picture for a long time, remembering things about him. See—I have father's picture in here," holding out a small gold locket which she wore on a chain around her neck for Virginia's inspection.

Virginia looked at the kind, noble face in the little locket, and her confusion became greater than ever,

but she could think of nothing to say. Betty was looking up at her intently.

"And my mother," she was saying, "says that she prizes more highly than anything else Father's picture—and her wedding ring."

Virginia became frightened. She quickly slipped her left hand behind her back, for she had forgotten a wedding ring.

Betty suddenly dropped the subject, apparently unconscious of Virginia's confusion, for as she arranged the roses in the rose-bowl, she said smiling, "I'm going to ask Cousin Paul next Monday if I can go riding. The mare's foot is nearly better, and I hope he won't refuse."

Virginia slowly recovered her composure, though she wondered greatly just what object the girl had had in such questioning. "How stupid of me to forget a wedding ring," she chided herself over and over again. "I never thought of such a thing till this moment—I fear my acting is very amateurish indeed."

The whole incident caused her no little concern and worry, while sharp-witted Betty was already forming her own opinion about many matters, and Mrs. Blair's identity was one of them.

As Paul approached the house that evening after his ride, something caught his ear. "Now," he muttered to himself, "what new music is this? I declare, my abode has become a regular rendezvous for musicians this summer. Has another cousin's

child arrived and is tuning up for my entertainment later on? Or——" Then he listened. "A gramophone," he sneered. "First a love song with piano accompaniment—then a violin—and dear knows what the boy played—likely a love song, too—even the air out here seems filled with emotion—and now this thing—I wonder what it sings of? I will soon be a haunted man—that wretched love song of Betty's haunts me. It sings around my ears—it moans in the wind—it seems everywhere following me about. I hear it now, 'Hold on to Faith' it sings, 'For my love has a heart of gold.' Trash, trash—could I strangle it now I would and hush it forever—and now this thing to further plague me," as the sound of the gramophone became clearer. "But I have hushed the others, and it remains for me to hush this."

Then instead of taking the drive to the left of the house leading to the stables he continued further down the road and turned in by another drive, which ran past George's house, joining the main road from the other side.

He drew rein and listened.

Mabel had put on a catchy song—he heard it in snatches—"I wonder who's kissing her now," it sang. "Wonder who's looking into her eyes—she ever tells him of me—the girl you love best in the arms of * * * the loves of to-day flit away—who is kissing her now."

He suddenly applied the whip to his horse and the

animal bounded off like a shot. "Confound it," his wrath exploded, "what more will I have to put up with. I'll not have the thing shrieking around here —I'll not have it, I say," and he rode to the stable in a high fury.

"George, what's this new music that I hear?" he snapped out.

"That's our gramophone," said George, hardly recovered from the enjoyment he had received as the strains of the last selection floated through the still air over to him, and never suspecting for a moment that any one could possibly object to it. "It's great, isn't it, sir? We think a lot of it."

Paul's fury died down. He could not order the man to never play it again—he would wait and resort to other methods should the thing continue to bother him. "It was only a comic song, anyway, and if they enjoyed it——

"Well, well," he answered not unpleasantly, "don't let the thing run all night—a little goes a long way."

But all through that night, as Paul tried in vain to sleep, at intervals a voice kept shrieking, "I wonder who's kissing her now—the girl you love best in his arms—she tells him of you—while he's kissing her now—kissing her—kissing her now."

"Plague it," he muttered each time that he heard it. "Plague it—love is a joke—and I'm a fool—just an out-and-out fool."

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR the past week each night as Paul returned from his ride he was compelled to listen to the music of the gramophone, and, as it happened, the selection he was favoured with was the comic song which had proved so disquieting to him. Perhaps it was the catchy swing to the song that so pleased Mabel, but she never seemed to tire of it.

Paul had put in a restless week. He had been losing sleep, and that, together with the almost constant war which waged within him, left him irritable in the extreme.

On the night in question as he returned he could hear the same comic song shrieking out at him, "I wonder who's kissing her now—I wonder who's looking into her eyes——"

His patience was at an end, and he looked like a man who, exhausted from an unequal struggle, sees ahead of him only one way of escape. As he flung the reins to George he snapped out, "I wish to speak to you at the house."

George felt that this order meant something. The situation might be serious. It all depended upon the extent of Paul's knowledge. He had allowed and perhaps encouraged Betty to break the rules, and just

now he remembered about the tools and different little things he had loaned to Robin for some purpose which he could only guess. His conscience pricked him for it all as he stood in Paul's presence, expecting to be called upon to answer for his sins. That Paul's business with him might bear upon another subject never entered his mind, and the question startled him.

"George, what did you pay for your gramophone?"

George grinned. The situation was not to be serious after all. "Fifteen dollars, sir," he answered, twisting his cap around in his hands. "And they told me it was cheap at that."

"Yes, yes," said Paul, thrusting his hand deep into his pocket and walking over to the window. "What would you sell it for?"

"Sell it?" stammered George. "I don't understand, sir. Who wants to buy it?"

"I do," snapped Paul.

George brightened. "I thought you liked it—but I can bring you one out from town any day you wish, sir."

"I don't want one from town. I want yours, George."

"Yes," agreed George, his hopes fallen.

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars for it. That's a fair offer, isn't it?" Paul grinned. The situation now called for diplomacy. "That is, providing you

agree to buy no other—this summer. One around a place is enough."

"There are the records," George remembered.

"No, no, I want no records—none at all." Paul was very positive about this.

"But, sir, you can't play it without."

"I understand thoroughly, and I don't want them."

"They are good ones, and——"

"Now, George," interrupting him and handing out a roll of bills, "here's the twenty-five dollars, and I'd like the thing right away." His voice was sharp and George didn't like the look in his eyes. Like a flash the real meaning of it all came to him.

"I might have guessed it," he thought, as he walked slowly over to his house for the gramophone which was no longer his. "But how the man can object to music like that is more than I can understand."

However, there was Mabel to reckon with.

"You've sold the gramophone to the Doctor," said she, on hearing the details of the transaction, while fury and disappointment fought within her, "and promised to buy no other? Well, all I can say is this, that lately you have shown signs of a weak mind, and now you've let go—your mind's gone, man—and for that matter, so is his—though he's no surprise to me—but I had looked for better things from you. You never once thought of me, I suppose—that's manlike, selfish and inconsiderate. Because that bear of a man wants our gramophone you sell

it without even consulting me, until the whole thing is over—and you know, George Lane—just what that bit of music means to me now. It's the only enjoyable thing I've had since I married you—and——"

"We can get one in the winter," said George, anxious to console her.

"It will be too late then—and you know it."

"Don't take on so, Mabel; I'm sorry—but he has to have it if he wants it. He don't want the records."

"Then he doesn't intend to play it," said she. "George, that sounds strange. Why does he want to buy it? I've got it—he hates it, and wants to get it out of the way. That's it. Now what song does he hate so, or is it just the music he doesn't like?"

"I guess it's that song, 'I wonder who's kissing her now'; that's generally on when he comes back at night, isn't it?" suggested George.

His wife's face brightened. "I've got it—I've got it—he's sour on women, some girl's likely jilted him and the song stirs it all up again." Then to herself she whispered, "I'll play him a trick—see if I don't."

As George carried the gramophone over to Paul, unknown to him one record was carried with it. Mabel had wound it up, and if the needle was lowered at any time Paul would be highly entertained with his favourite song. As Mabel thought of what might happen she laughed heartily and the disap-

pointment of losing her treasure seemed partly avenged. "It would serve him right," she said over and over again.

Paul took the box from George and laid it on the table. Then, when he was alone, he lifted it and stole quietly out into the hall, as though he were being watched, and hastily mounted the steps to his room. As he hurriedly looked about for a hiding place he turned the box on its end, wondering if it could be reversed. As he did so the top, not firmly fastened down, opened slightly and something moved inside. He quickly adjusted it, and at once the needle fell, and the burr of the opening chords started the song, "I wonder who's kissing her now——"

"By Jove," Paul said, "this is terrible." He was in a frenzy. In great haste he seized the box and thumped it down in the middle of the bed. "Just imagine the girl you love best——"

He piled the pillows and the comforter upon it, but though muffled the words were quite distinguishable: "So you never can tell—who is kissing her now."

In sheer desperation he drew the heap near the edge of the bed and sat down hard upon it.

The music ceased and he sat there afraid to move, lest with the pressure off it might start up again. "Strangled at last," he muttered between his teeth. "But I wonder how long the thing takes to run down. Confound it, confound it," he kept saying. "It's got the joke on me—all right."

Robin had gone up to his room a few minutes before George had returned to the house, and now, hearing first the strange music and then the confusion with its many muffled sounds of different kinds following, he came to Paul's door and knocked.

Paul turned pale. "Who's there?" in a voice in which fear and rage mingled.

"Just me," called Robin. "Anything I can do for you?"

"No!" roared Paul, "except go to your room and go to sleep—at once. Do you hear?"

Robin did as he was told, and when he closed his door he whistled softly, "There's something up, but I heard music. I'll swear I did—I say—but this house is a jolly old musical centre, now, isn't it? What a heap of fun there's going to be around here soon—but say—I wouldn't miss it for a farm—not on your life."

Then he stood silently by the window for quite a long time looking up into the stars and listening.

Paul found his position becoming constantly more unbearable. He could not move lest the thing start up again. The only course open to pursue was to sit there indefinitely. But, he argued, "Even if I sit here all night, when I get up in the morning it may start again—and the tragedy will be all the same, be it morning or night." Then he blazed out: "Confound the thing—confound George—and confound the wretched song. Plague them all—I am a bigger fool than I thought, and that was bad enough. Here

I sit strangling this wretched song, while I'm blessed if I care who's kissing her now—I'm blessed if I do." With that he stood up.

The music began again and he hastily resumed his former position. He was furious. "I must think of something." He turned over in his mind all the possible things to do that he could think of. Nothing suited the situation until, "I have it," he exclaimed almost aloud, so great was his feeling of victory. Then quickly he seized a small cushion which formed the seat for a low rocker beside the bed. "You are finished," he said to the song, as its muffled strains reached his ear. "You are done."

Then, without making any more of an opening than was necessary in the covering, he slipped the cushions underneath, and, feeling for the cover of the box, he stuffed it inside. Immediately the song ceased and Paul stood up exultant.

"Never again," he said, as in a moment he uncovered the box, "will you shriek that miserable song at me. You are hushed forever—if I could dig a hole just now, I'd bury you deep—but I'll think of a worse fate—and for now you will slide under the bed." So saying he took the box and none too gently pushed it out of sight.

But as the night advanced he became simple and rather childish, as he kept arguing with a little voice, "What do I care, I'd like to know," he sneered, "who's kissing her now—I'm blessed if I do." But

the little voice kept answering, "You're a fool, Paul James—for you do care—and you know you do."

The next day when Paul was in the laboratory with Robin, he suddenly remembered that as the room was to be swept and cleaned that morning the gramophone would be discovered. Quickly excusing himself he rushed upstairs, only to find that he was too late. The room was in perfect order and his treasure still under the bed.

He groaned. "I wonder if George's wife attends to this. By Jove, this is terrible." Then he took the box and shoved it into the huge lower drawer of his clothespress and locked it.

While sweeping Paul's room that morning, Mabel suddenly came upon her lost treasure. She pulled it out quickly and opened the top. "I wish I'd been here," she said, convulsed with laughter, "and I've a grave notion to set it again. I just wish I dare—I do hope he had a good dose of it."

CHAPTER XXV

"COUSIN PAUL," said Betty, as on the following Monday she spent her usual half-hour with him, "if you had a wife and lost her, would you sorrow very much?"

"It's all foolish, Betty," he answered. "All fearfully foolish. In the first place, I wouldn't have a wife, so I couldn't lose her; then I wouldn't have to mourn for her."

"But supposing that you were another sort of man, one of these soft-hearted fools—as you call them, deceived into thinking that a woman is a nice sort of possession—and married her—and loved her—and all that sort of thing."

"Cut it short," broke in Paul.

"Very well," she said pleasantly, moving a bit nearer to him. They were out in the garden, and Paul had been tying up some unruly vines which persisted in growing the wrong way. "What I mean is this: Supposing you were different and loved and lost. Would you mourn?"

"It's the correct thing to do, Betty. But why such foolish questions?"

"If I loved any one and lost them, it would break my heart," she whispered softly.

"Do you think you are capable of love, Betty? I mean by love, faith, trust, fidelity. Could you trust one even though he failed you? Would you have faith in him, even though he lost it in himself? Could you be faithful to the end?"

The face she lifted to him was beaming as she laid her hand tenderly upon his withered right arm. "Cousin Paul, you do believe in love, or you would not speak like that."

He looked sharply at her and snapped out: "Believe in love? Why, child, I believe in love as something visionary, and idealistic only. Any practical demonstration of it that I have seen falls far short of my conception."

She did not like the sneer in his voice, but she held her ground. "You could love like that, and you could inspire that love in another."

"Love!" he burst out. "Love! I am sick of the sound of the word. Great Lucifer, Betty, is there no other topic of conversation? Each day we discuss some phase of this wretched emotion. Why did you mention the subject to-day?"

"Cousin Paul," she announced abruptly, "Mrs. Blair has no wedding ring."

"Merciful heavens, this is a relief; but what have I to do with that? By the way, I have heard almost enough of this woman—I am sick of her."

"She has no picture of her husband," Betty further commented.

Paul laughed. "That looks bad, doesn't it?"

"Don't make fun of it—it's serious," she said.

"Serious," he laughed again, "because this man-hating woman has no picture of her husband. Why, child—she killed him with her nagging."

"And," went on Betty, unheeding his comments, "she said she *thought* her husband was fair."

"Probably she had never really looked at him."

"And she often sits out in the summer-house until midnight—and when she comes in her face is radiant."

"A dreamer," said Paul, "or, better still, she plans some further wickedness."

"When I gave her the rose you sent her, her eyes filled with tears—and she fastened it in her dress."

"Probably hysterical," Paul commented. "But look here," sharply, "no more of her, Betty. She doesn't interest me in the least, and I'd advise you to talk less to her. By the way—see here—what do you do with yourself all day? Yesterday, for instance; give me yesterday's programme."

Betty turned away. "I read most of the time," she said.

"Don't you go for a walk sometimes during the day?" He was becoming interested.

"Oh, yes," she replied lightly.

"Well, now, just where do you usually go?"

"Oh, anywhere."

"For instance, yesterday—where did you go?"

She wondered if he knew—but showed no surprise. "Just down the road a ways," she said.

"Down the road?" he repeated thoughtfully. "Do you ever meet any one?"

"Oh, no," she laughed. "Now, Cousin Paul, you know very well that there is no one to meet around here—so why do you ask? There is no one except George or the old postmaster, or the farmer down the road—no one else at all—you know that. But my time's up, so I must run away." She was looking at him with mischief in her eyes. "And won't you give me another rose for the Woman in Charge—a beautiful pink one without any insects at its heart?"

"No," he said, and there was a twinkle in his eyes, though his voice was sharp. "I'll do nothing of the kind, young lady, and I think you need watching."

She lifted saucy blue eyes to him as she quickly whispered in his ear, "And I think you need loving." Then she ran laughing out of the little gate.

"I need loving," he mused, as he stood alone by the ivy-covered archway. "Yes, child," something moaned within him, "I need loving—and," he sneered, "I have this instead," as with a jerk of his body he flung his right arm out. "Yes, I have this useless dangling thing; but," and his lips tightened, "one-handed and alone—I'll win out."

That night as the moon was full in the heavens and the little path leading down to the pine grove lay like a fairy trail, Betty stole quietly out of the garden gate and daintily tripped along its moss-covered way. As she passed through a shaded spot, she thought she heard steps behind her. She listened

again—there was no mistake—some one was following her. Then she flew like a deer down the path and over the bridge, never turning until she came in sight of a shelter that had been built beneath the oak tree. It was a little house of poles and pine boughs. There were four poles driven into the ground, and six planks formed the roof, while the walls and shingles were made of pine boughs. A Chinese lantern hung from the middle of the roof, and there was a little light in it. She looked hurriedly about—no one was there—then at her elbow stood Robin—very much out of breath.

"Some one followed me," she whispered in fear.

"I did," he laughed, "and a merry chase I've had. I went up to meet you and as I stepped into the path you took to your heels, little Fairy—and, by Jove, it takes some runner to catch a fairy. Here you are, breaking the law to honour me with your sweet presence, and you run like a hare away from me." They both laughed at this.

"But I didn't know it was you," she retorted gaily. "I thought it might be Cousin Paul, and it would be fun, wouldn't it, to give him such a chase? But," she added seriously, "he's suspicious."

"How's that?"

"He said to-day," she confided, "that I needed to be watched, and I know by his questions that he is beginning to wonder, at any rate."

"Betty," said Robin, looking into her eyes, "this

is the fourth time that we have met down here in this beautiful grove. Are you sorry?"

"Sorry for what?"

"Sorry that we met? Would you be sorry if Dr. Paul knew?"

"Would you?" she enquired of him.

"No."

"Then neither would I." To change the subject she added quickly, "You've got it finished," motioning to the little pine-covered shelter.

"Yes," he said. "I finished it to-day, and George gave me that old Chinese lantern. He found it somewhere about."

"In the moonlight, it looks like a house the fairies might inhabit," she said, stepping inside.

"It is," said he. "I never look in but I see a fairy there."

She took down his violin as it hung from a hook inserted in one of the poles. "You promised to play if I came in the evening when the moon was shining. You said you could play better then."

"This is the guest chair," he commented, placing an old stool before her. "I cribbed it from George when he wasn't looking, and I will sit on the moss at your feet, and play the song I played that night I first tried to beguile you, Betty."

"But you didn't," she flashed at him.

"No, but I'm going to try again. 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again,' " he quoted. "Though

I'm a bit further on, you must admit, for now I know that you are Betty—and you are here."

"Yes," said she, "but you don't know who I am."

"Won't you tell me to-night? Won't you tell me what your other name is?"

"No, not till after you play."

"Will you then?"

"I'll not promise—but I'll consider it deeply. However, if you don't play right away, I'll run home. I shouldn't have come, anyway." This with decision.

"I'll play," he said, laughing up at her.

Then into the balmy air rose the song of his violin, while his heart kept singing within him a song his lips could not utter. It must wait a little longer—for it was a very sweet, tender song—and could only be sung into a heart that was waiting for it.

"Somehow it makes me think of the sea," she said when he finished. "The wonderful, restless, heaving, lonely sea. How I love to sit and dream by its side, as it moans and breaks on the shore."

"Betty," he said, looking up at her, "what is your last name—will you tell me?"

"Not to-night, Robin James—not to-night. I couldn't possibly be induced to do so. It's not the time for it."

"Why?"

"There's a mystery about it," she said.

"There's a mystery about everything," he replied.

"The Doctor's a mystery, and the house is a mystery. I thought that you had ceased to be a mystery, but I find I was mistaken."

"Do you swim?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes," and he became thoughtful a moment. "But, Betty, tell me truthfully, did you ever hear the name Robin James before?"

"I told you once, why ask again?"

"Think," he said, "of the sea, and a storm blowing the billows high—then think of me—of my name. Betty, have you not heard it before?"

"It's some other girl you have met at the seaside, and you've got us mixed. Some girl you cared for, maybe."

"Betty," his voice was deep and low, "I have never cared for any girl—in fact, I have met very few—but once a long time ago—a little girl with golden curls and eyes as blue as the sea flashed a smile into my boyish heart—and it's been there ever since." He looked into her eyes, but she turned away. "Betty, won't you tell me your name?"

"Not to-night," she said.

"Will you come again to-morrow night?"

"No."

"The next night, then?"

"I'll see."

"Promise."

"I'll not promise," she said, "but I'll think about it a little—and decide later on."

"I'll be here," he said, "waiting for you."

Then he blew out the light in the little pine-house, and together they went up the moonlit path to within sight of the house, when Robin waited behind, and watched till she vanished into the shadow of the trees on the lawn. Then quickly he stole up another way and entered the house by the front door.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE following evening Paul and Robin sat together in the library. They had spent the most of the day in the laboratory, and a vision of work and accomplishment rose up before the mind of the younger man—of the years lying ahead—while Paul experienced, as never before since life had robbed him of achievement, a sense of renewed hope and encouragement.

He had begun to live again in this fresh young life before him. Through him again the touch of his skill would become manifest. Into the fingers of the younger man would throb the cunning and sensitive touch that had meant relief to so much suffering and hope to hearts in despair. The story was not told—the book was not ended. Just another page had been turned on which was to be written a new chapter.

"When you finish your post-graduate course," Paul was saying, "I want you to come and live with me, and carry on the work I have had to lay down, and, boy—you have come into my life now—and your coming has been a good thing. You will not leave me—for I need you."

Robin's face lighted up. This was the greatest

moment of his life. "Doctor," he answered, while his eyes rested tenderly upon the other's lifeless arm, "I will gladly spend my life in trying to be worthy of the great trust you honour me with. I can never fill your place, but if I can accomplish a little of what you accomplished—if I can make my life tell in the path of usefulness and achievement, and in the relief of suffering in some degree as yours has told, I will have lived well and will be content. But, sir, for the privilege you have given me of the constant inspiration of your presence, and your teaching —I can only thank you—by endeavouring and striving to be my noblest and best; as for leaving you—why, Doctor, since childhood you have been my idol —to be near you is my greatest desire fulfilled. To have you need me, sir,—I cannot speak of this." Robin now stood with bent head before Paul, and his heart was full of something he could not say.

"Yes," replied Paul, gripping the young man's hand, his face haggard and drawn, "I need you, Robin—there is a battle I am waging with myself —I pray God you may never have to fight—an inherited tendency that dogs my footsteps and creeps into my being with its damnable cunning—attacking me in lonely places when I am off my guard. Day and night it hounds me. It spies on me from the dark. It smiles and fawns on me—endeavouring by wile to draw my soul into its clutches—thinking, no doubt, that this useless thing," jerking his lifeless right arm, "is my only weapon against it—but,

lad," his voice was filled with pain, "one-handed I have fought it—and soon—yes, soon—I will win out."

Robin could only grip the hand in his—he could say nothing. After a moment Paul went on. "It's been a bitter struggle—a lone, hard fight. We are only human—we think we can walk alone in our own strength—but the touch of a strong, kind hand means much, lad—some one to believe in you—some one to trust in you—it means almost everything. I have suffered much through pride; what I have condemned in others I have used as a weapon against myself. False pride robs life of all that's best and noble. Never let it get a foothold in your life—and so—because I have lost much—I need you." He ended wearily. He had spoken slowly—all the fire and spirit gone out of his voice.

Robin could not speak, his heart was too full for words. So much had been cleared up, and as he listened and understood, the man he had idolised as a master physician appeared as a hero before him. His own petty interpretations of yesterday humiliated him, and, because of them, he could only sit there in silence, with bowed head.

As they sat thus, the west wind blew the scent of flowers in through the open window and the moon shed its fairy light like a benediction upon the sleeping world.

At last Paul spoke. "Leave me now," and his

eyes were closed. "Turn out the light as you go—I'll be alone a while."

Robin went quietly up to his room, his mien solemn as though he had entered upon a sacred mission, and lighting up his face was a radiance which had its source in his heart. Life held a new meaning for him; besides, his soul was offering up a prayer to God. "Help me to prove worthy of it," he prayed.

As Paul sat there, his eyes closed, a moonbeam strayed into the room and rested upon his right arm as it hung helpless by his side. Then it wandered up and reached his face. His eyes opened and it stole timidly back to his arm. "Yes," he mused bitterly to himself, as he saw it there, "it's worthless—the life has gone out of it forever—but as a weapon it may be useful some day. God knows, the battle is closing in—and my need is great." Then his soul called out in the dark, "Mother, are you near? Don't lose your faith in me—and I'll—win out yet."

Then the moonbeam gently lifted its light to the wall and cast its radiance upon the picture of a woman whose loving eyes rested upon the bowed head of her only son. Following its gleam, he looked up into those tender, trusting eyes, and the despair went from his face, as the night flies before the rising sun. "Mother," he called, "I'll not fail you."

CHAPTER XXVII

AS Betty tripped down the little winding path to the pine grove, she looked furtively about as though expecting some one to suddenly appear, but no one parted the bushes, and the world lay silent around her; only the gentle twittering of a bird in its nest, as it called to its mate now and then, breaking the stillness.

When she reached the little pine-house Robin stood under the dim light, holding in his hand a trembling robin. "I had crossed the bridge to meet you," he said, "when I spied this little fellow in the grass—so I ran back to the light to see what the injury was. Its wing is broken." So they sat down together and tied it up, and with a handkerchief made a soft bed for it in the moss.

"I'm going to be a nurse," she said, when they were done and had seated themselves under the oak tree by the side of the little pine-house. "I would love that more than anything."

"What is the definition of a nurse?" he asked whimsically.

"You should know," she laughed.

"How's that?" he looked up. "Who told you about me, mysterious Betty?"

"George."

"And so you have been discussing me with George? Pray, when was this?"

"You're not my father," she chided.

"No," he laughed, "and I wouldn't want to be. I have another ambition."

"Ambition often leads men astray," she retorted.

"That doesn't fit, Betty. But what did George tell you of me?"

"That you were a plain doctor chap," she said.

"Not even that yet." A serious note was in his voice. "But if hard work and endeavour can get me anywhere, by Jove, I'll be that and more, some day. I tell you what, Dr. Paul is a hero—and no mistake."

"He's a dear—just a big cranky dear."

"But he's more," defended Robin proudly. "I am just beginning to know him—how big and human and grand he is—but he's lost so much—he's suffered so and he's lonely, too. I know he is."

"Yes, so do I," she replied, comprehending more than he thought. "I think he's in love, don't you?"

"That's a new one. I hadn't thought of it—but perhaps he is—but what about all his hatred for women?"

"Just a bluff," she assured him. "He believes in love, for he told me he did—only his conception is very high."

"Yes, everybody believes in love," Robin said thoughtfully. "But I say, Betty, let's go back a ways—what's the definition of a nurse? Listen and I'll

tell you—a sweet girl with blue eyes and golden hair, who rubs your head when it aches—and sits by your side when you're sad—cheering you up with her smile. In short," he glanced shyly at her, "a nurse is a sweet girl who helps the doctor."

"That definition is altogether too sweet for me," she said tritely. "I'm going to be a real nurse—not just an ornament, and I'll do more than rub heads and sit down and grin."

"Yes, you'll break hearts," he said. Then, turning suddenly to her, "Betty, you promised something last night."

"Yes, but I'd rather have you tell me what was the name of the girl."

"I'll tell you about her. One summer, long ago, I went with my mother to the sea—I could swim well and was proud of it—but a little girl down there could swim better. We faced death together one day—and won out—together." He had taken her hands in his and she did not withdraw them, but she did not look into his eyes. She could not. He continued, his voice trembling a little. "You can't forget one you face death with, dear—can you?" He slipped one hand into his pocket and now held something out to her. It was a little dried-up acorn, but the shape of a heart was cut into one side of it —his voice was low and his face very near to hers as he went on. "Betty Wilson, do you remember the day you cut this?" She only dropped her head lower. "I have carried it all these years for luck

—and it has brought me the very best, and now I am going to ask more of it. Betty, lift your head, dear—do you remember it?—where is yours?"

She lifted her face to him and in her hand she held the other one—with the little hole cut in the top where a ribbon had been put through. "I didn't wear it very much," she said very, very low—so low that he had to bend still nearer to hear, "but I've kept it."

Then he whispered into her heart the sweet, tender song that had been his some time, just waiting until her heart should be ready for it.

It was such an old song, too, and had been sung by one mate to the other ever since the world began —but never before had the notes been sweeter—or the words of the song truer.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SEVERAL times during that day Paul had observed with many surmises as to its cause the absent-mindedness of Robin. In fact, traces of this sort of thing had been evident for some time past and Paul had sought for a solution. This attitude of Robin's, together with a remembrance of his last conversation with Betty, forced him now to a conclusion, not far from the truth.

He returned from his ride somewhat earlier than usual, determined upon drastic action. After enquiring of George as to Robin's whereabouts, and receiving an evasive reply, Paul went up to the house. The young man was not there. He walked back to the stables. George was whistling a bit too merrily, Paul thought.

"Anything I can do for you, sir?"

"How long has Mr. James been away?" he enquired sharply.

"Some little time now, I reckon," came the guarded reply.

"Do you know where he went?"

"No," stammered George, in an effort to be truthful. "At least, sir, I'm not very sure."

"How long has this been going on?"

"I can't say." George was in a tight corner. "What do you mean?" he asked uneasily.

"Just this," said Paul, "does Mr. James go out every night after I leave the house? Answer straight, George, for you know what I'm up against."

"Mostly every night now." George regretted that necessity compelled him to tell on Robin. "For the rules were hard, and young people had to have some fun," he inwardly defended.

"George," Paul arrived at a quick decision, "take this message to Miss Betty: 'I wish to see her in the library at once.' "

George felt his blood turn cold—but Paul looked at him in such a way that he knew there was nothing further to be said.

"Immediately," he snapped.

And George went.

A moment after Paul reached the house, George appeared in the library. "Miss Betty is out," he said, afraid to look at Paul.

"Out?" he repeated, staring at George. "Enquire of Mrs. Blair as to her whereabouts."

Returning a moment later, George reported: "Mrs. Blair does not know just where she is."

"Just," snapped Paul. "Mrs. Blair does not know just where she is, and you do not know just where he is."

George felt very uncomfortable, for Paul's eyes seemed to pierce him through. "Thank you, George. I will see Mr. James when he returns."

George was dismissed, and felt glad to get outside in the dark again. "It's a fine mess we're all into now," for he saw no humour in the situation whatever. "A fine mess. The young people are in for it all right—I hope he's easy on them—sure they couldn't help meeting—no more'n the birds could help mating."

As Robin entered the house a little later, and proceeded on his way to his room, Paul called him. "Robin, I wish to see you." There was something in the tone of the words that told him "the game was up," but the wonderful happiness that night had brought to him outweighed all else, and he feared nothing.

Paul looked up and scowled as Robin entered, while his voice was cutting. "Young man, because your name is James, I thought you worthy of trust. You have failed me."

Robin remained silent, and Paul went on. "I come in to-night and find you out—and I believe it is your custom to leave as I leave, and return before I return—but to-night I surprised you."

The words were bitter and Robin paled under them. "Would you kindly be seated and explain your actions to me," Paul continued.

"I have no defence to make," Robin said in a strained voice. He could not betray Betty. "It is as you have said."

"Were you alone to-night?" Paul questioned.

"No."

"Who were you with?"

"I cannot tell you, Doctor."

"Will you kindly ask George to come here? Then go to your room, and I will call you later."

When George came Paul said, "I think Miss Betty is in now. Will you tell her I wish to see her?"

While this scene was being enacted in the library, Betty had stolen in quietly through the garden gate. She snuggled up close to her the little wounded robin, afraid to leave it in the pine-house, in case it should meet with further harm.

Virginia was in the garden waiting her return. "Betty," she said, somewhat agitated, "I fear that your cousin will be angry. He has sent for you, and I had to say that you were out. Truly, child, I cannot have you leaving me at this hour again—no matter what the excuse. I have worried about you. Where have you been, and what are you holding so tightly?"

"A little robin," said the girl. "See, its wing is broken, and I thought to bring it in here. I was afraid to leave it in the woods."

"You have been in the woods?"

"Yes, and I want to tell you something, Mrs. Blair." Her face was beaming as they went into the summer-house and Virginia put her arm around her. "Yes, dear, tell me," she said gently.

Then Betty told her it all. How she had first met Robin years ago, down by the sea, and about the

little house in the woods and of meeting him there now, and of how he had played his violin to her.

"And?" questioned Virginia, as the girl paused abruptly.

"He loves me," said Betty simply.

"And you?"

"I love him, too." Her face beamed as she continued, "And I am going to tell Cousin Paul all about it. It will soften him up a bit."

"Yes," said Virginia, "tell him all about it, dear—that love is everything—and that life is not worth living without it. Tell him that, Betty."

"You love some one, too?" said the girl gently.

"Yes, child," she whispered. "I never knew how much I loved—till now—but I have—lost him, dear."

"Is he dead?"

"No, he is not dead—but his love is—I killed it years ago."

"It couldn't die—love couldn't die," Betty whispered in her ear.

At that moment George appeared at the gate. "Miss Betty, Dr. Paul wants you at once."

"Very well, I'll come—at once," as she followed him.

"It's all up," he said solemnly, as they walked around to the front door. "The cat's out of the bag, Miss."

"It's not all up, George—there's more to follow—

joy has arrived, and it's here to stay." She smiled up at him.

"Would to God it were—the place is sore needing it," he retorted earnestly.

Then she left him and sped on through the open door to the library. Paul had moved his chair to the table, and sat there shading his eyes with his hand. He was in deep thought as she entered and she stood in the doorway a moment before he looked up. There was such sadness in his face that her high courage failed her for a moment.

He motioned to a chair beside him, and she came slowly over and sat down.

"Betty," he began brokenly. She quickly moved a footstool to his chair and knelt there beside him, while her face flushed deeply.

"Cousin Paul, I will not be questioned, for I am going to tell you all about it. I am not ashamed of anything I have done. I only feel badly to think that I may have caused you annoyance—for I love you too much for that. That you should be angry with me, after all your kindness, would be more than I could bear. I can never repay you for all your goodness to me. You believe me?"

He did not answer.

"It was not Robin's fault." He looked up in surprise, but she went on, "So don't blame him—for it wouldn't be fair. I could not stay just in the rose garden, Cousin Paul, I wanted to wander about—and so in the evenings I often stole down to see

George, and the mare with the sprained leg. George told me I should not come—so don't blame him either, please. Then by accident—I found out that some one else lived in the house—and he found out about me in the same way—just by mere accident," she repeated with emphasis. "Then there is a little pine grove away over there," motioning with her head to the rear of the house, "where I used to go in the afternoons. One day he happened to be there too, and we met—but we knew each other before. You see years ago—when we were just children down by the sea, he saved my life—so you see, Cousin Paul—I had to be nice to him, didn't I? And you couldn't blame him for remembering me. You can't very well forget some one you saved." There was a little catch in her voice as she ended, and looked up. He had turned his head away, but now he gently laid his hand on hers. "Go on," he said.

"It's hard to go on," she replied timidly. "Not because I'm ashamed to—but because it's all so new and—wonderful—can't you guess the rest?"

He laid his head back in the chair and closed his eyes—he still held her hand, though he spoke bitterly. "Yes, I can guess. You love him and he loves you—the old story—two young people thinking God made each for the other—dreaming sweet dreams of the years to come—living—striving, joying, suffering—together—but always together—believing and trusting in one another. It's just a fairy

tale, child, nothing more. Love! There is a mother's love—that is holy and true—she never doubts you, believes in you to the last—but the love of a woman for a man must be called by another name."

"And the love of a man for a woman?" she asked softly, bravely meeting his gaze, "is it unselfish—and kind always—always believing and trusting and holy and true? Is the love of a man for a woman ever that?"

He did not answer and turned his face from her.

"Would he still believe in her if she failed him—would he trust her again? Would he still have faith in her when she had lost it in herself? Would he be faithful to the end?" she reached up and tenderly laid her hand on his shoulder. "We must each trust and believe in the other, and forgive when one fails, and keep on trusting, and forgiving—life is like that—I know for mother has told me—and life is made up of loving and suffering—and joying—but the loving leads the way—and the joy follows—while the suffering is soon forgotten—because no heart can be sad forever. I love Robin, Cousin Paul—and I'll try to have my love for him as beautiful and holy as you say it can be—for you know," and she bowed her head waiting for him to speak.

"Yes, I know," he said, and all bitterness had gone from his voice. "I know now, as I never knew before, just what love is—but my knowledge has come too late. I know, child, that life is what you

say—just forgiving—and trusting—and joying and suffering—and the bitter unkind things that I say are not true. Pay no heed to them—Robin is worth the best love you can give him, and I do not blame either of you—and Betty—you remember the song you sang one night to me—about a 'heart of gold'! You have it, child, 'a heart of pure gold.' The world will be a better place because you are in it." Then he got up and went over and stood looking up into his mother's picture—for a long time.

Betty waited beside the chair, silent and wondering. When he turned again to her he smiled, though there was no joy in it, and his voice was so changed that she looked up in surprise. He went to the door. "Robin," he called, "I wish to speak to him," he addressed her. "I was sharp with him to-night."

As Robin entered, surprise and incredulity shone in his eyes as they rested on Betty, but Paul quickly assured him. "You know each other," he smiled, "Betty has told me all about it, and I want you both to be happy. I am glad that you met one another here—and that this old place of mine should be made a trysting-place for such loyal lovers." His voice was hard and strained, though he still smiled at them. "I am glad that this place, the scene of so much love in the years gone by—should still—though circumstances armed themselves against it—be true to its old tradition. You see," he kept on smiling, "it shows how very strong love is, doesn't it? The strongest thing in the world. There is no

defeating it—you cannot put it down. You think you have your heel upon it—but lo, it springs up, more alive than ever. It's the one thing that lives forever." His voice rang shrill and he laughed harshly. "Yes, Betty and Robin," as he drew them together, while they could not smile—something was wrong. It was too strange to be natural. "You are happy—smile then," he chided, "and let us be gay together. I am happy in your happiness—happier than I have been for years—yes, years and years—and happier than I will ever be again. Time moves slowly sometimes—and often days seem years—so it is years since I was happy before—I do not blame you—how could I? Love draws hearts together—as a sunbeam opens the rose. Now give me your hand—each one—and then wander about in the garden together. The moon is up and your hearts are young, so away—and dream—and may your dreams be as golden as mine were once." His face had become pale and as Betty watched him, she pitied him. "Then to-morrow night," he went on, "we will have a dinner-party. The house has been dreary long enough. There will be no restrictions—no rules to be followed. We will be one family together—you are my guests—and we have been strangers long enough—and now," he ended, "while you two walk in the garden I will plan for this celebration of ours."

They could not speak, there was nothing to say—but Robin reached for the girl's hand and they went

out together—their hearts rejoicing for themselves —but greatly perplexed as to what manner of mood this was that affected Paul so strangely.

While Paul sank low in the armchair and planned for to-morrow.

CHAPTER XXIX

THERE was excitement in the kitchen the following morning when George handed in the instructions for the dinner that night. Such preparations had not been made since the days of the famous grandfather, when entertainment was provided for some still more famous guest.

Both George and Mabel went about as though suffering from a shock of some sort, while Mary's eyes shone with the light of adventure. "Something was really going to happen at last."

Virginia's heart told her much that she could not have otherwise understood—and though fearful, and far from entering into the joy of it she determined that in every detail the dinner that night should maintain the old-time dignity of the house of James —and Paul seemed a part of that dignity as he sat at the head of the brilliantly lighted table—his face haggard and drawn, while his eyes shone with an unnatural brightness.

He smiled as he rose to speak, but the smile sent a chill to the heart. "This little party," he said, "is in honour of a betrothal—the first betrothal to be celebrated here since the days of the courtship of my parents. Love came to them here, and it re-

mained with them to the end. That is why we celebrate now. May the spirit of that love—if it hover near—enter into your hearts and make of your love for each other a holy thing—that will remain with you as it did with them—to the end. Since then the spirit of pride—false pride—has entered in. It has sought to drive away the old spirit of love, that haunted every nook and corner of this sacred place. Your mother, Betty, sacrificed all for the man she loved. Pride drove her out, and she trod the path alone with him—but here, in this hallowed place, love has won out again, and pride, I pray, will now leave us forever. The toast I would raise is to Love—the love that trusts and believes—that hopes and forgives—and knows no shadow of changing. May this love bind your hearts together as golden threads in the weaver's loom pattern a design of exquisite beauty into a background of grey—that when the grey falls away with the wear of years—the light of the setting sun shows the golden threads to be brighter than ever before." As he finished his voice sounded hollow and dry, and his white lips were as though parched.

Robin rose to reply—never before in his life had he felt so dumb. His heart was full of joy, yet that joy seemed a mockery. He stood in the presence of something greater than joy—it was pain—not his pain—but the pain that stung and seared the heart of another. "My heart is full," he said brokenly, "full of joy and suffering. I never knew before that

they travelled so closely together, but I thank God for the joy—the joy that has come through the love that is mine. May I ever be worthy of it—and I pray that as the morning sun lifts the shadows from the hills—so may joy drive all pain from this house forever."

Paul had not looked up as Robin spoke. His chair faced the open window, and his eyes looked into the gathering dusk.

"See," he said, "the morning may come—but the night gathers first. Let us be merry—and joyful." His voice had taken on a new note, like the note the bugler sounds when, with fear clutching at his heart, he marches on. "We are to be gay—I want music—come, Betty," and he led her across the hall to the library.

At Paul's command the room had been laden with flowers. The air was heavy with them. Huge bouquets filled the rose-bowls and vases, while pure white blooms formed a mound in the centre of the old-fashioned table in the middle of the room. The piano had been returned to its place, and Paul walked briskly over to it and opened the case. "This is the night for love songs—and Robin will make his violin sing as it never dared sing before—away, boy, and get it." The colour was slowly mounting to his face, and his eyes were as though they had been dilated. He looked at Betty but did not see her. "Now come, let good cheer abound." He led her to the piano with an old-time gallantry and

seated himself close beside her. "'The heart of gold,' first," he said, "that's a woman's heart—eh, Betty?" he laughed, and it smote her heart like a sneer. "A tender, sweet, beautiful woman's heart—that loves you to-day—and leaves you to-morrow. Sunshine—then shadow—that's life—ups and downs. Still the road runs on—and you plod along—too weary to live—but fearful to die." Betty had been playing softly while he spoke. "How easily words come while you play, I talk on and forget you are playing and you play and forget I am talking—to forget—that's the keynote to happiness—forgetting."

"No, it's remembering," said Betty, her voice trembling.

"Remembering for you, and forgetting for me. You see you haven't much to remember—and I have so much to forget. To-night I am going to forget—you're glad of that—aren't you? I am going to forget everything—then I shall be happy like you." He raised his head and laughed. "The idea is," he explained, still laughing, "the idea is to laugh and forget—now for the song."

Her voice trembled as she sang, and between each verse she offered up a prayer—she didn't know quite what for—but for the thing—whatever it was—that Paul needed most.

"And another—and still another," he said, as she finished.

So she sang and played on while he laughed and

applauded. "Now, Robin," he said, "play a love song—a sweet tender love song. They hit the right spot to-night. Music—music—how I am steeping my soul in it. As I told Betty, I am forgetting—that's why I am so gay. She remembers and sings—she sings well that way—for it's sweet to remember—but I listen and forget—I forget the skeleton in the cupboard—I am going to bury it to-morrow." He laughed shrilly at this. "Bury it deep, with its pale blue rags—love is no skeleton—I was wrong—wrong—why, I've been wrong all along, but I'm right now—you and Betty have shown me the way. Now for your love song, Robin. You two play together—that's better, mingle the songs into one—that's the way it should be."

Then Betty and Robin forgot for a little that Paul was there as their fingers played the same melody, and their hearts sang to each other.

"I have been thinking," said Paul as the last chord died into stillness, "of that little pine grove down yonder—your trysting place." The colour had gone from his face again and the laugh from his voice. "You are free to wander down there—together now—if you will. The moon is up, I think—but the night is young—and—I have had enough music—for to-night." Then added wearily, "I have something to do now."

When they had gone he crossed over to the dining-room. The lights were still on and the table had been cleared—all but a bowl of red flowers which

formed the centrepiece—and the lighted candlesticks at either end.

George had just entered.

"I was about to ring for you," Paul said. Then noting the man's embarrassment he asked, "What is it you wish, George?"

"I hate to bother you, sir," George stammered, "but Mabel takes on so about that gramophone—I sure don't know what to do about it. She's not well," he coloured, "and misses it more for that."

Paul interrupted him. "Go upstairs to my room, George, and open the lower drawer of the clothes-press. Here is the key—and take the gramophone back to your wife. I won't need it any longer—get it at once, George," he added with a strange impatience, "and then come to me, I wish to speak to you."

Of all the remarkable happenings of the last few hours this was perhaps the most surprising to George. He stood staring at Paul unable to grasp it. Then he slowly left the room.

Paul paced restlessly up and down until he returned.

"To-night we have had feasting and laughter, George. The young people are happy—and it is now my turn." He did not look at George as he spoke, and his fingers drummed a quick tattoo on the high buffet as he stood leaning against it.

"Yes," said George, his tongue stiff and his heart thumping.

"That case, you remember," Paul's voice was harsh and cold, "that you stored in your cellar sometime ago—open it and bring me one of the larger bottles." Then his lips grinned. "A fair exchange, George—take back the music and laughter—and bring me forgetfulness."

George stood dumb, and his legs refused to move.

"I mean it," Paul said.

Then George went.

When he returned Paul was still standing by the buffet. He had evidently not moved. "Open it," he said.

In a moment George returned and laid the bottle, the cork put lightly in it, on the table.

"Do you need me?" asked George, hardly able to speak.

"No, not again to-night," Paul answered in that same cold voice. "Tell your wife to set the music going," he added as George left him.

George stood silent outside in the hall scarcely knowing what to do. To tell Mabel would be of no avail, but he had to confide his fear to some one. He went to Virginia, it would be best for her to know.

"I fear for him," he explained, "and could not leave the house without telling you about it—the day has been too much for him."

"Yes," said Virginia, "thank you, George, for telling me. Don't worry about him—he will be all right—I know it. What you fear will not happen—

he will—win out," she said slowly and he left her wondering greatly as to what manner of woman this was who could so assure him.

After he left, Virginia sat in deep thought for a long time. When she lifted her face it was very sad and her eyes were misty. Then in a little while she stole softly downstairs, and through the side hall till she came to the dining-room door. She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes, while her hands clasped and unclasped nervously.

She could hear Paul speaking, and the pain in his voice made her heart ache. "Why delay, you fool," he addressed himself, as he stood by the table with his left hand thrust deep into his pocket. "Why fight on now—you are beaten—it's all up—you came out here to forget her—and you can't. Your heart cries for her—oh God!" he moaned, "I can't crush it—I cannot win out—I long for her in the night—and I see her everywhere—on the green—in the chair beside me. Her false beautiful face follows me everywhere—and I want—her." His voice was so low she could barely hear. He sank into a chair by the table, and almost roughly drew the bottle to him—then he slowly poured it into a glass until the glass was full. "Fill it up," he muttered brokenly, "fill it up to the brim—you fool—ugh—I am putty." He roused himself in disgust. I'm as weak as water—I am beaten—after all my fighting—my heart's as soft as a chicken's—chicken-hearted—ha, ha," he laughed and it rang as a broken, hollow

thing. "No, let me drink—drink—drink—I can fight no longer—I am done." His voice came brokenly now, "So let me forget—forget." He reached out his hands for the glass, then his voice came in jerks. "Just a moment more—just one moment—one last moment before—my last weapon," and with lips set in a superhuman effort he slowly withdrew his hand, and with it he lifted his lifeless right arm and laid it on the table, touching its dead fingers to the glass. Then his head fell on his arm and he groaned —while in agony he fought a little longer.

Virginia stood like a ghost, her hand on the knob of the door. "I must go to him," she breathed, her heart full of pain and longing—so full that she thought it would break. "He must win—I can't let him lose now—oh God, I cannot."

Then she opened the door and stood silent a moment. He did not move—he had not heard her. She went silently over to him, and knelt beside him, while she whispered very low, "Paul, you must—win—out—you must win out."

"Yes, little voice, I have heard you before," he moaned, "but I am almost done now."

She saw that he thought her a spirit voice.

"Fight once more—a little longer—you cannot lose."

"No more," he said. "Yes, I have lost to one—why not to the other?"

"But I will help you," she spoke so low, he could but hear it.

"I need more than you," he said, "I need her."

Then she gently laid her hand upon his, as it rested on the table. He looked up as though in a dream, expecting perhaps an angel was there.

Her eyes were full of love as they met his—but he drew back and stared at her. "You," he said, "you here?"

She could not speak, and her face was very pale.

He slowly drew himself away from her, while his eyes seemed to condemn her. "You here?" the words were like stabs, "to witness my humiliation—to watch me lose. You with your beautiful face—and your false heart."

"Paul," she spoke with a great effort, "you do not know what you are saying—I could not let you lose —I had to come here—to be near you—to help you." Her voice broke and she dared not look at him.

"How did you get here?" he asked harshly.

She did not speak or look up, and he came over and stood before her. "Answer me," he demanded, his eyes searching hers.

She stood with downcast eyes before him. "I am the Woman in Charge."

He stood and stared at her for a moment, and she did not raise her eyes.

"You came here to spy on me," he accused her.

She reached out her hand to him—her heart was breaking with pain—her eyes closed. "Paul," she

whispered, "I came here to love you." She swayed as though she would fall, and he caught her.

"Virginia," he breathed, "is this true?"

She raised her arms and put them about his neck —while she whispered into his ear, "The truest thing in the world."

Then he clasped her to him, as though he would never let her go. "The little voice was you? I had often heard it before."

"Yes," she said, "my heart has called to you all day long—every day—and in the night—the long dreary nights, my soul has been with you."

"Defeat has been turned into victory," he whispered, "oh love, I cannot live without you—I need you—you know now—how much. That you should have come here to be with me—all these long dreary days—was more than I deserved. You have gone down into the depths with me—but, dear, now the day breaks—and we will climb the hill together. Your love—your wonderful woman's love—has borne me up—and I am free. I have won—no, not alone—you and I together."

"Yes, together, Paul, and together we will enter into a new day. My pride almost lost you to me, but now—I have no pride—love has driven it away."

"And beloved," he said softly, while his voice was full of a new tenderness, "we will believe—and trust in each other—never doubting—forgiving and loving—and helping each other all the way. Then the road will be strewn with the radiance of heaven

—and life will be one glad, sweet day—and when the night comes we will enter it together—with clean hands and pure hearts, unafraid." Then very gently he repeated, "with clean hands, and undefiled. I have not failed her—my mother—and now—we will enter the room that was hers together. She will be there to bless us—I have a right to enter it now—for I can look into her trusting eyes—a man—once more. We will lift the blinds and the room—her room will be flooded with the glory of heaven. The way has been lone, dear—and the battle hard—but the strife is over. With you I have come out victorious—our path lies in the sunshine—the shadows we feared have gone forever."

THE END.

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